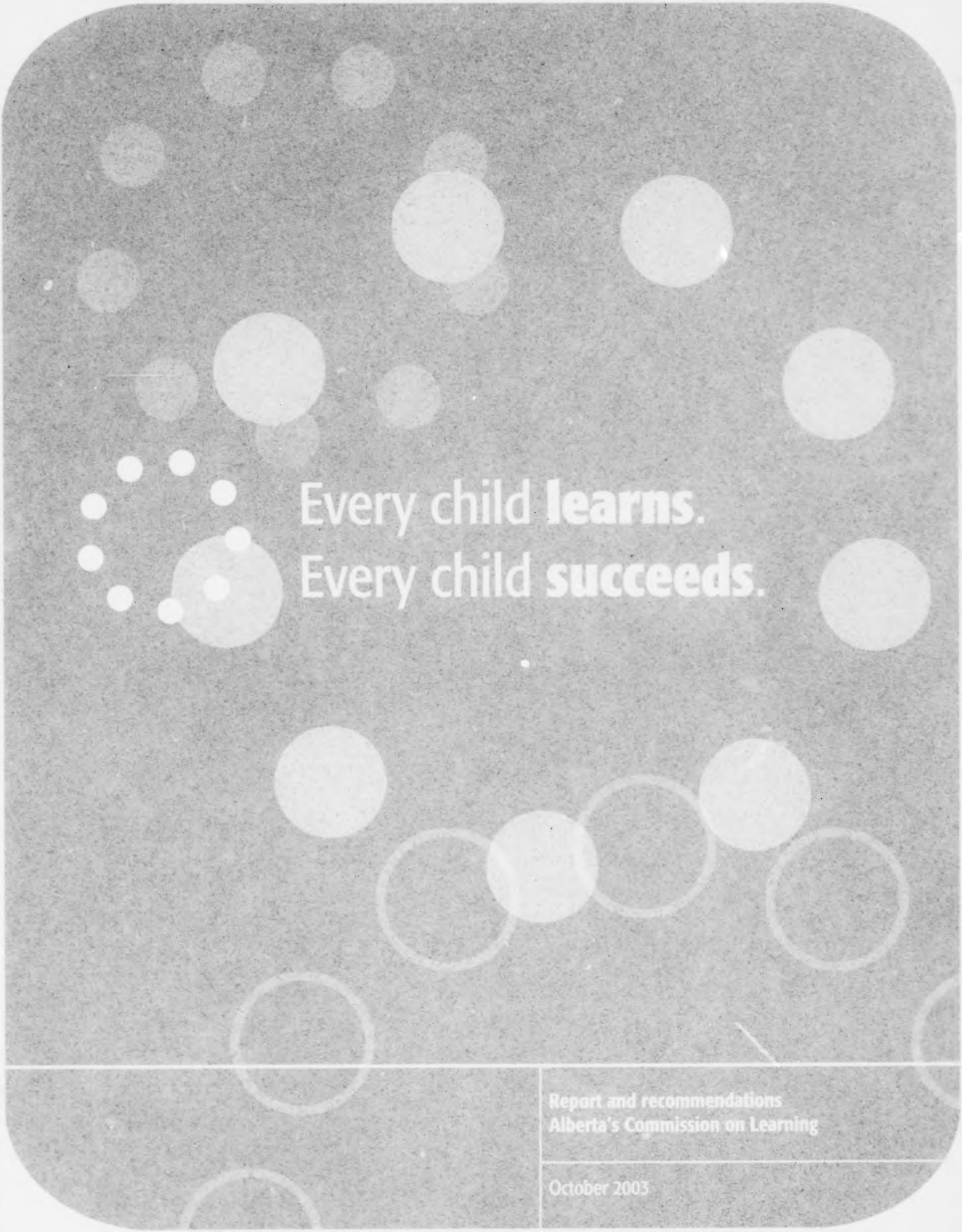

Every child **learns**.
Every child **succeeds**.

Report and recommendations
Alberta's Commission on Learning

October 2003

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A word of thanks

Albertans care deeply about the education of their children and the future of their education system. That was obvious from the literally thousands of individuals who took the time to participate in this review. It was obvious from the passionate and heartfelt views expressed by parents and students, teachers and trustees, and the staff at Alberta Learning. It was obvious in the pride people showed in their schools, their programs, their teachers and their students.

While there may be divided opinions on what should be done, there is no division when it comes to an overriding commitment to education and to giving Alberta's children the very best education we can provide.

The Commission would like to thank all of the individuals and organizations that participated fully and openly in this review process. Your views have been heard.

We encourage all Albertans to read our report, to discuss and debate the ideas we've proposed, and to continue your strong commitment to Alberta's children and the future of our education system.

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The Commission would also like to thank the staff of Alberta Learning who provided outstanding support to the Commission in compiling the workbook results, providing information, and assisting with the Commission's research program.

October 2003

Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg
Minister of Learning
Government of Alberta
#204, 10800-97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Dr. Oberg:

As members of Alberta's Commission on Learning, we are pleased to provide our report and recommendations for the future of Alberta's education system.

This report is a culmination of months of work listening to the views of hundreds of Albertans, reviewing research and trends, seeking the best advice from experts, exploring options, and developing our own ideas and recommendations.

We sincerely hope that our report will stimulate discussion and debate. More importantly, we hope it will act as a catalyst for concerted and deliberate action across the province. Throughout our consultations, we learned how deeply Albertans care about education. In their view, and ours, education is, and will continue to be, the best investment we can make in the future of our children and our province.

As members of the Commission, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in such a challenging and important task. We now turn this report over to you and encourage you and all Albertans to take up the challenge, to work together and to ensure that every child learns and every child succeeds.

Patricia Mackenzie
Patricia Mackenzie, Chair

Mike Davenport

Thomas Erasmus
Thomas Erasmus

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Highlights

Every child **learns**. Every child **succeeds.**

After months of consulting with Albertans, listening to ideas and suggestions from a wide range of education stakeholders and experts, and reviewing research studies and reports, the Commission's vision for the future of education in Alberta comes down to a few simple but compelling words - every child learns, every child succeeds. Surely, that is what we all want for Alberta's children - for every one of them to learn and every one of them to succeed in school, in their careers, and in life.

This final report from Alberta's Commission on Learning provides highlights of our extensive consultation process, the views we heard from countless individuals and organizations, along with a comprehensive review of research on a wide range of topics related to the Commission's mandate. It challenges all of us to look beyond the issues of today, to imagine our province ten or more years from now, and to think of the kinds of skills, knowledge, programs and supports children will need to succeed now and in a future that could be very different from what we see today.

The Commission's vision begins with five very important starting points.

The first is that Alberta has an outstanding education system. This was reinforced in comments and presentations throughout our public consultations. That doesn't mean, however, that we can be complacent and accept what we have as "good enough." It simply means we have a higher platform to spring from.

Second, education is the most important investment we can make as a society. Our education system not only shapes individual students' lives, it shapes the very nature of our society. A strong and vibrant public education system - a system that values each and every individual, instills positive values, and builds tolerance and respect - is critical to develop social cohesion and the kind of civil society Albertans want for the future.

The third point is that it's critical to look beyond the pressing issues of today and prepare for the future, whatever that future might hold. The best approach is to ensure that the education system remains flexible, resilient and able to anticipate and adapt to what will undoubtedly be a climate of perpetual change.

Fourth, education will become even more critical to individual Albertans, to their communities, and to our province as a whole, especially with the growing importance of skills, knowledge and ideas to the future of our society and Alberta's role in a global economy. Albertans are strong supporters of their public education system. However, it will only remain one of the best systems in the world if we take deliberate actions to keep it that way.

Finally, the most important point is that everything in the education system must start and end with children and youth. Schools are not there for teachers, for administrators or trustees. They're not there for parents, for businesses, or for governments. They're there for students. And the first and only criterion for judging the success of schools and the education system should be how well every child learns.

To achieve the vision we set, the Commission believes that concerted and deliberate actions are needed in eight areas:

1. ***Ready to learn*** - Making sure all children come to school ready to learn. That means actions are taken early, by their parents and by all the adults involved in children's lives, to ensure that all children get a positive and healthy start in their lives, and to identify and address potential problems before children come to school.
2. ***What students learn*** - Maintaining a world-class curriculum and ensuring that students learn the skills, knowledge and attributes they need to succeed in learning, in the workplace, and in life.
3. ***The schools we need*** - Developing excellent schools - schools with a compelling drive to improve students' outcomes, ensure they learn to the best of their abilities, and help them become confident, capable and productive individuals, prepared to pursue their goals and contribute to society.
4. ***Success for every child*** - Adapting programs and providing support so that all children, including Aboriginal children, children with special needs, children new to Canada, and children who have special gifts and talents, get every opportunity to succeed in school.
5. ***Making the grade*** - Setting high standards and ensuring they are met through ongoing assessment, improvements and accountability.
6. ***Technology plus*** - Not just learning about computers or adding computers to schools but learning with technology and making sure a range of technologies is fully integrated and used as powerful tools for both teaching and learning.
7. ***Excellent teachers and school leaders*** - Ensuring that every child is taught by capable and caring teachers and every school is led by an outstanding principal.
8. ***Good governance*** - Providing thoughtful and capable governance, positive labour relations, and engaging the various partners in education in an environment of mutual trust and respect.

Key directions and recommendations

Ready to learn

The seeds for success in learning are planted well before children come to school. Children need a healthy and nurturing start in life, early detection of problems that could affect their learning, and a chance to have those problems addressed before they start school.

Recommendations

Support the role of parents

1. **Establish parenting centres in communities across the province with close links to elementary schools.**

Expand kindergarten programs

2. **Establish new junior kindergarten programs on a phased-in basis.**

3. **Establish full-day kindergarten programs.**

Coordinate services for children

4. **Ensure better coordination of programs for children provided by the provincial government and at the community level.**

What children learn

Alberta has an excellent curriculum. It provides a sound balance of reading and mathematics, understanding history, geography and world events, learning about sciences, appreciating the arts, keeping physically active, learning languages, and getting experience in a number of career areas. This balance should be maintained. The key challenge is to ensure that the curriculum is continuously updated and revised so that it remains a rigorous, thoughtful and world-class program. It's also critical that schools prepare young people for a growing realization that a high school diploma is the minimum ticket for entry to the workforce. Far too many Alberta students drop out of school and too few of them go on to complete post-secondary education.

Recommendations

Expect clear outcomes and values

5. **Ensure that clear outcomes and expectations continue to be in place and supplement those expectations with a set of values to be reinforced and reflected in all schools.**

Maintain and improve Alberta's world-class curriculum

6. **Maintain and continuously improve Alberta's comprehensive and balanced curriculum with:**
   - An ongoing emphasis on core areas such as language arts, mathematics, social studies and science
   - Opportunities for students to gain an appreciation of the fine arts, learn languages in addition to English, maintain active and healthy lifestyles, explore emerging careers, and develop specific career-related skills.

   In addition, the following specific areas should be reviewed:
   - Fine arts - All students should have opportunities to learn and experience the fine arts at all levels in the education system. Fine arts should be mandatory up to grade 9 then optional for students in grades 10 to 12.
   - Career and Technology Studies (CTS) - The program should be reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of students and provides them with focused experiences in a number of career fields.

7. **Introduce a new wellness program for all students from kindergarten to grade 12.**

8. **Provide all students with the opportunity to learn a second language.**

9. **Ensure that when new curriculum is implemented:**
   - Adequate support is available for comprehensive inservice activities for teachers
   - Support is available for new learning resource materials
   - Arrangements are in place so that it is clear to teachers and students whether or not new high school courses will be accepted for post-secondary admission purposes
   - Mechanisms are in place to quickly and effectively address any problems that may occur.

10. **Improve students' transitions from grade to grade and school to school by ensuring better communication, coordinated plans, and appropriate support for students.**

Prepare the next generation

11. **Develop and implement a comprehensive, province-wide strategy with the goal of ensuring that 90% of students complete grade 12 within four years of starting high school.**

12. **Undertake a comprehensive, independent review of Alberta's post-secondary education system.**

The schools we need

Schools must be places where excellence is the hallmark of everything they do. For all children to learn and succeed, schools should operate as professional learning communities dedicated to constantly improving results, students should be in classes where they are able to receive the attention they deserve, students should have access to adequate support from counsellors and other supports, and schools should be the centre of coordinated services for students. With a strong public education system as the foundation, parents should continue to have choices in public and separate schools, francophone schools, alternative programs, charter schools, distance learning, virtual, and private schools, and home schooling.

Recommendations

Develop professional learning communities

13. Require every school to operate as a professional learning community dedicated to continuous improvement in students' achievement.

Implement class size guidelines

14. Establish and implement province-wide guidelines for average class sizes across school jurisdictions.
   - Rather than set legislated limits or hard and fast rules, there should be flexibility in the size of classes.
   - School jurisdictions should be expected to meet the guidelines on average class sizes across their school jurisdiction. That means the guidelines would not necessarily be met in each and every classroom but should be met on average across the school jurisdiction.
   - The suggested provincial guidelines should be:
     - Junior kindergarten to grade 3 - 17 students
     - Grades 4 to 6 - 23 students
     - Grades 7 to 9 - 25 students
     - Grades 10 to 12 - 27 students.
   - Class composition should be considered by schools in setting class size. Generally, classes with special needs students, students whose first language is not English, and vulnerable and at-risk students should be smaller than the suggested guideline. Classes should also be smaller in cases where there are safety considerations such as vocational classes.
   - School jurisdictions and the province should be required to report annually on average class sizes and should be accountable for explaining whether or not the guidelines have been met.
   - The province should provide adequate funding to enable school jurisdictions to meet the class size guidelines. Information on average class sizes should be included in school jurisdiction profiles and used to determine provincial funding levels.

15. Abandon the use of pupil-teacher ratios and replace it with measures of class size and the range of professional and paraprofessional support available for classrooms.

Guarantee adequate time for students

16. Maintain current guarantees for hours of instruction available to students and ensure flexibility in scheduling to allow professional learning communities to work effectively.

17. Encourage schools and school jurisdictions to explore alternatives to the current school year.

Expand students' access to counselling and other specialized services

18. Ensure that all students have access to adequate counselling, diagnostic and other specialized services necessary for them to succeed.

Establish a new "education link"

19. Establish a province-wide "education link" telecommunications service to provide teachers, parents and students with immediate access to specialized services and advice.

Develop schools as hubs of services for children and communities

20. Ensure that schools become the centre of a wide range of coordinated, community services targeted at meeting the needs of children and youth.

21. Encourage shared use of facilities, programs and services among school jurisdictions and with the community.

Maintain and build schools

22. Ensure that sufficient and predictable funding is available to renovate existing schools and build new schools where and when they are needed.

23. Consolidate funding for building and renovating schools, as well as the operation and maintenance of schools, within the Alberta Learning budget.

Ensure safe schools and positive choices

24. Ensure that all schools encourage positive attitudes, good behaviour and respect for others, provide a safe environment for students, and address incidences of disruptive behaviour when they occur.

25. Continue to provide high quality choices while, at the same time, preserving and enhancing public schools.

26. Maintain current limits on the number of charter schools and the length of their terms and expand efforts to share their outcomes with the rest of the education system.

Success for every child

Alberta's classrooms include a rich and diverse mix of students with a wide range of abilities, interests, backgrounds, languages, cultures and religions. Deliberate actions are needed to ensure that this diversity is embraced and every child has a chance for success in school.

Recommendations

Improve education outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth

27. Implement and provide adequate resources for the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework.

28. Ensure that, when a First Nations student who resides on a reserve attends a provincial school, he or she is funded at the same level as any other student.

29. Ensure that, where significant numbers of First Nations parents send their children to provincial schools off reserve, they have a role in the governance of those schools and the school jurisdictions responsible for the schools their children attend.

30. Initiate discussions with treaty region governments and the federal government to address the governance of education for First Nations students.

31. Establish appropriate incentives to encourage more First Nations and Métis to become teachers.

32. Ensure that at-risk Aboriginal children are identified early and get the support they need before they begin school.

33. Take steps to ensure that First Nations and Métis youth are well prepared for post-secondary education and the workforce.

34. Ensure smooth transitions for students moving from reserve and Métis Settlement schools to other public schools.

35. Establish parenting centres to make a positive link with parents and reinforce the strong parenting skills required to help their children come to school ready to learn.

36. Require all schools with a significant population of First Nations and Métis students to have well-trained home-school liaison workers to assist in integrating the school into the community and developing sound communications between Aboriginal homes and schools.

37. Explore and implement new governance models for schools in Métis Settlements.

38. Develop and implement expanded Aboriginal language and cultural programs.

39. Ensure that First Nations and Métis are directly involved in the development of curriculum and learning resources for and about Aboriginal people in all subject areas.

40. Continue to provide choices for Aboriginal parents for the education of their children.

41. Establish a provincial centre of excellence in Aboriginal education.

Address every child's special needs

42. Ensure that adequate support is in place when children with special needs are integrated into regular classrooms including:
    - Access to professional support for assessment
    - Access to appropriate learning resources and assistive devices (e.g. Braille)
    - Paraprofessional support
    - Coordinated services with health centres, Child and Family Services Authorities, community organizations, and parenting centres
    - Adequate time for teachers to organize and plan programs and support services with teaching assistants, other professionals, and community agencies
    - Smaller class sizes.

43. Ensure that teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development activities prepare teachers to address the diversity of students, including children with special needs.

44. Provide classroom teachers with adequate support to develop and implement individual program plans for children with special needs.

45. Expand early assessment and intervention to ensure that children with special needs are identified early and get the support and programs they need before they come to school.

46. Provide appropriate training and professional development for teaching assistants who work with children with special needs.

47. Ensure continuity in funding for children with special needs from junior kindergarten through to grade 12.

48. Expand opportunities for students with special needs to continue on to post-secondary education or into the workforce.

49. Develop a province-wide strategy using SuperNet as a vehicle for expanding programs and developing challenging opportunities for gifted and talented students.

Provide support for children with diverse languages and cultures

50. Provide students with English as a second language, students who are not proficient in English, and francophone students who need upgrading in French, and their teachers, with access to appropriate assessment, programs, learning resources, professional and paraprofessional assistance required to meet their needs.

51. Extend funding for English as a second language, English language deficiency, and French language upgrading to children in junior and regular kindergarten.

52. Create provincial proficiency standards for assessing English as a second language students, students who are not proficient in English, and French language upgrading students, and provide funding until students reach the standard.

Making the grade

Accountability is critical. Students want to know that they are making the grade and ready for their next challenges. Parents want to know how well their children are achieving on a regular basis and in comparison with provincial standards. And the public deserves to know how well our education system is preparing young people for their futures. The province's highly regarded testing program should be maintained and enhanced.

Recommendations

Encourage school improvement, research and innovation

53. Ensure that the primary focus of school and school jurisdiction education plans continues to be on improving students' achievement.

54. Continue to support research and innovative approaches for improving student outcomes.

Maintain and improve provincial achievement tests

55. Maintain and improve provincial achievement tests at grades 3, 6 and 9 by ensuring that:

- Provincial achievement tests continue to be used as a system-wide check on how well students achieve provincial standards
- Results from the tests are used along with ongoing classroom assessments to guide and inform plans for improving students' achievement
- The tests are enhanced over time to include a variety of tasks that allow students to demonstrate the full range of their skills, including their ability to apply their knowledge, think critically, and express their thoughts and ideas.

56. Develop and implement a French language arts achievement test for grade 3.

57. Regularly report results from provincial achievement tests as part of ongoing reporting to parents and within a context that helps them understand and interpret the results.

Maintain and continually improve diploma exams

58. Maintain and enhance diploma exams and include a balance of multiple choice and written response questions in all subject areas.

Support ongoing classroom assessment

59. Ensure that all teachers have access to high quality, performance-based and cutting-edge classroom assessment materials and practices.

Provide province-wide information and accountability

60. Provide ongoing, comprehensive, consistent and transparent information to Albertans about the outcomes achieved by Alberta's students.

Technology plus

Technology affects virtually every aspect of our lives and it is changing how people live, how they work and how they learn. We've called this section "Technology plus" because it's not enough to simply have computers in schools. Technology has to be integrated into all aspects of teaching and learning and used wisely and effectively to improve results for students.

Recommendations

Learn with technology not about technology

61. Implement the proposed Learning and Technology Policy Framework and fully integrate the use of technology in every classroom in the province over the next five years.

62. Set province-wide standards for the types of technology that should be available in every classroom.

63. Expect principals to provide proactive leadership in integrating technology in both the instructional and administrative aspects of the school.

Prepare teachers for integrating technology

64. Require all teachers to be proficient in the integrated use of technology and ensure that they have the necessary support in the classroom.

65. Model the appropriate application of technology in all teacher preparation programs and provide adequate, ongoing professional development.

Use technology to improve access

66. Expand the use of technology to improve access to education programs and related services in rural and remote communities.

Provide adequate support

67. Provide adequate funding not only for the purchase of hardware and software but also for necessary technical support, training, and continuous upgrading of equipment.

68. Regularly assess the effectiveness of new technology and applications and provide advice to school boards to guide their decisions about the purchase of new technology.

Excellent teachers and school leaders

Teachers are critical to the success of students and the success of the education system. We need to ensure that they continue to be well prepared for the challenges they face and that consistent professional development activities are available throughout their careers. The role of the principal is becoming increasingly challenging and deserves a special focus within the education system, particularly in preparing principals and providing ongoing support and professional development.

Recommendations

Improve teacher preparation programs and experiences for beginning teachers

69. **Review and improve current preservice programs for teachers to ensure that they provide excellent preparation for Alberta's beginning teachers.**

70. **Establish a permanent mechanism for ensuring a closer link among faculties of education, superintendents, teachers, and Alberta Learning.**

71. **Require school jurisdictions to adapt the first-year experience and provide effective coaching for beginning teachers.**

Expand professional development

72. **Develop and implement comprehensive professional development plans for every school jurisdiction and every school.**

73. **Require all teachers to have targeted annual professional development plans that are directly linked to their schools' improvement plans.**

Ensure competent teachers for every student

74. **Ensure that policies and regulations on supervising and evaluating teachers are well understood and effectively implemented.**

75. **Replace the current Board of Reference process with an arbitration process that is consistent with models in place for employees who have the right to bargain collectively in the province.**

Recognize and support the leadership role of principals

76. **Develop a quality practice standard and identify the knowledge, skills and attributes required for principals.**

77. **Establish a new program to prepare and certify principals.**

78. **Establish a new Council of Education Executives to provide certification, ongoing support and professional development for principals and assistant principals.**

Develop outstanding superintendents

79. **Develop a comprehensive, targeted program for preparing superintendents and providing ongoing professional development to support them in their role as CEOs of school jurisdictions.**

80. **Remove the current requirement for the appointment of superintendents to be approved by the Minister of Learning.**

Good governance

No one wants to see a repeat of the labour situation in 2002. Much as some might think we can turn back the clock, it is not possible to go back to the way it was before the strike. A new approach to collective bargaining is needed. In the longer term, it is important for all of the key partners in education to sort out appropriate roles and responsibilities and work together in a positive and collaborative way to achieve the best outcomes for students.

Recommendations

Establish a new collective bargaining model

81. Create a new approach to collective bargaining with four key components:
- Establishing a legislated employer bargaining association
- Maintaining the Alberta Teachers' Association as a single organization responsible for professional services and collective bargaining for teachers
- Limiting what can be bargained for collectively
- Expanding teachers' professional responsibilities but maintaining their right to strike.

Balance roles and responsibilities

82. Maintain a balance between centralized and decentralized responsibilities for the provincial government and school boards.

Explore opportunities for amalgamating services

83. Provide provincial incentives and support to school jurisdictions that wish to consider joint services and amalgamations in order to improve services to their students.

84. Develop common technology standards for financial, accounting, student information, human resources, and other key information systems to improve the administration of education.

Build effective and engaged school councils

85. Reinforce the role of school councils and require principals to actively engage parents in school improvement planning.

86. Clearly define and set province-wide policy on what is considered "basic" and what are considered "extras" in relation to fund-raising by school councils. Limit school councils' role in fund-raising to "extras" consistently defined across the province and require schools and school councils to report annually on their fund-raising activities and how the funds were used.

Investing in our children's future

Throughout its consultations, the Commission consistently heard that current funding is not adequate to meet the growing expectations of schools. This clearly doesn't mean that money is the only answer or that simply pouring more money into the system will make all our troubles go away. But money clearly is part of the answer and an issue that must be addressed.

Provide adequate funding for the current education system

Based on analysis of the adequacy of current funding done for the Commission, our conclusion is that there is a shortfall of $90.6 million. That amount covers the additional costs of unfunded salary and cost pressures, provides adequate funding for children with severe disabilities, increases funding for operations and maintenance of schools on an ongoing basis, and reinstates credit enrolment unit funding with caps on the maximum credits allowed for grade 10 students. An additional $46 million is required to implement a new funding framework. This brings the total amount required to address the estimated shortfall and implement a new funding framework to $136.6 million.

Recommendations

87. Address the current shortfall in funds as soon as possible, but no later than the 2004-05 provincial budget.

88. Address the shortfall in operations and maintenance funding on an ongoing basis.

89. Implement the Renewed Funding Framework as part of the budget for 2004-05.

90. Provide sustainable and predictable funding.

91. Implement a transparent, open and understandable financial information system that provides accurate, timely and comparable information on funding for Alberta's education system.

92. Establish a mechanism for school boards and teachers to provide ongoing and regular input to the provincial government on the overall costs of education and related issues.

Support new initiatives

Not all of the initiatives recommended by the Commission require additional funding. Many can be achieved over time within existing budgets and several should help streamline services and reduce costs. However, a number of major initiatives such as introducing new junior kindergarten programs or implementing province-wide guidelines on class size will have definite cost implications. The Commission has developed estimates of the costs of each of the major new initiatives.

While the costs are significant, they need to be placed in perspective. The province currently invests $3.8 billion in Alberta's education system. The new initiatives recommended by the Commission in phase one would increase that investment by under 6%. Furthermore, the investment we make today in the education of our children will pay substantial dividends for generations of Albertans to come. Albertans have consistently said that education is one of their top priorities. For us to succeed in giving every child the chance to learn and succeed, for us to have a highly skilled and well-educated workforce, and for us to develop the kind of civil society Albertans want, there is no better investment we can make than in education and the future of our children.

The Commission also is confident that there will be substantial long-term savings, particularly from investing in early intervention programs for children at risk. If the province invested $73.5 million in making sure at-risk children come to school ready to learn, then the long-term savings could range from $294 to close to $662 million.

Recommendations

93. Phase in funding for new initiatives recommended by the Commission on a priority basis over the next five years.

Examine and implement new sources for additional funds

Every child should have equitable access to education and an equitable opportunity to learn and succeed. That means equitable funding must be available in every school jurisdiction across the province. The primary source of funding should continue to be the provincial government, through a combination of general revenues and education property taxes. At the same time, the Commission believes that school boards should have the opportunity to raise an additional, limited amount of funds from their residents. This provides a direct link between school boards and their electorate and allows people in different communities to provide additional support to meet local needs and priorities. The Commission also looked at school fees and concerns that school jurisdictions not be allowed to raise school fees to a level where they could compromise some children's access to education.

Recommendations

94. Allow school boards to requisition their local residents for up to 10% of the amount raised through provincial education property taxes.

95. Set province-wide policies on school fees that would:
- Prohibit fees to cover the costs of basic education items
- Detail what charges can be levied and set maximum caps on school fees
- Allow reasonable fees for extracurricular activities.

Proposed Funding Requirements

Funding the current system	Priorities	Estimated cost
Shortfall in current funding	Unfunded salary and cost pressures Children with severe disabilities Operations and maintenance funding Grade 10 credit enrolment funding	$19.8 million $23.0 million $31.0 million $16.8 million
Total shortfall		$90.6 million
Implement new funding framework	Fair allocation with no school board receiving less money	$46.0 million
Total		$136.6 million

Funding for new initiatives	Priorities	Estimated annual incremental cost
Phase 1 - Years 1 - 3	Class size guidelines for kindergarten to grade 3 Parenting centres Full-day junior kindergarten for at-risk children Full-day regular kindergarten for at-risk children Aboriginal initiatives Second languages Technology standards	$111.4 million $10.5 million $42.0 million $21.0 million $17.3 million $2.2 million $20.0 million
Total Phase 1		$224.4 million
Phase 2 - Years 4 - 5	Class size guidelines for grades 4 - 6 and 7 - 9 Half-day junior kindergarten for all children Full-day regular kindergarten for all children Aboriginal initiatives Second languages Technology standards Education link	$26.4 million $86.0 million $86.0 million $10.0 million $3.2 million $20.0 million $4.0 million
Total Phase 2		$235.6 million
Total new initiatives		**$460.0 million**

Overall Total	$596.6 million

Concluding comments

The Commission would like to thank the thousands of individual Albertans, parents and students, teachers and trustees, education stakeholders, and experts who participated in this important review.

Clearly, Albertans care deeply about their education system. Alberta is fortunate to have one of the best education systems in Canada and North America. But that doesn't mean what we have today is good enough. The education system can and must continuously improve to meet the challenges of the future.

The Commission urges Albertans to review this report and think about the changes we have proposed. There is no doubt that some of our recommendations will be well received while others will be the subject of heated debates. That's a good thing. Our education system is too important to ignore, and the best results will come from ongoing discussion and debate, careful thought and deliberate action.

By working together and investing in the future of our children, the Commission is confident that Alberta will lead the country, if not the world, in the quality of education and we'll achieve the vision. Every child will learn. And every child will succeed.

Many things we need can wait, the child cannot.
Now is the time his bones are being formed
his blood is being made,
his mind is being developed.
To him we cannot say tomorrow,
his name is today.

Gabriela Mistral, Chilean poet

Taking a comprehensive approach

Alberta's first review in over thirty years

Alberta's first in-depth examination of its education system in more than thirty years was launched in June 2002. Alberta's education system is known as one of the best in Canada and some would say it's among the best in the world. At the same time, much has changed in thirty years and, looking to the future, we can be almost certain that change will be a constant factor. The key objective, then, is to examine not just short-term issues and pressures in the system but to look beyond the hot buttons of the day and consider where our province and our society are headed and how we can make sure our education system is as responsive as possible. Most important, the key challenge is to ensure that Alberta's children and youth are well prepared for whatever their futures might bring.

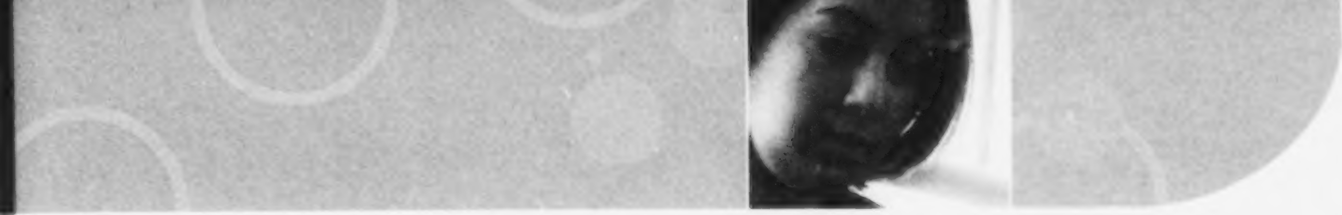
The idea of reviewing the education system stemmed initially from the Alberta Future Summit. Education stakeholder groups also suggested that a comprehensive review would help guide plans for the future. When the Education Services Settlement Act was introduced in 2002, it included a commitment by the provincial government to launch a review of the education system.

From the outset, the review was designed to be comprehensive, forward looking, and to engage a wide range of Albertans. A nine-member Commission on Learning was established to guide the process and to prepare recommendations in seven broad areas:

- Ensuring excellence in the classroom
- Meeting the needs of a changing student population
- Facilitating smooth transitions into and through the system
- Focusing on results
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities and governance
- Providing responsive and relevant curriculum
- Building a sustainable and high quality system for the future.

Within the scope of those broad areas, the Commission was expected to address topics such as class sizes, pupil-teacher ratios, hours of instruction, supporting special needs students, curriculum development, the impact of globalization, technology, and changing demographics.

Specifically, the Commission's mandate was to "provide recommendations and advice to the Minister of Learning on ensuring a sustainable basic learning (Kindergarten to Grade 12) system that supports the lifelong learning needs of students and the societal and economic well-being of the province."



A comprehensive process unfolds

The review process was comprehensive, involving an extensive consultation process, public meetings, submissions and presentations, meetings with education stakeholders and experts, discussions with students, meetings with Aboriginal leaders, visits to schools, and a comprehensive research program. A list of the various organizations and individuals the Commission met with or heard from is included in Appendix 1.

This section provides highlights of the key themes and ideas presented to the Commission through its extensive consultations. Appendix 2 provides a summary of what the Commission heard through its consultation process as well as a summary of the responses to the Commission's workbook and the consultations with youth.

In addition to this final report, the Commission prepared an interim report. *The homework continues ...* provided an early summary of many of the issues that were raised during the consultation phase. The interim report was released by the Minister of Learning in January 2003.

Consulting with Albertans

In September 2002, the Commission began an extensive process to involve and engage Albertans in province-wide consultations. The process involved three key components:

Responses to the Commission's workbook

A workbook was prepared providing background information, raising issues, and seeking people's views on a series of questions directly related to the Commission's mandate. People were able to respond either by mail or online. The response to the workbook was tremendous and thousands of completed workbooks were submitted to the Commission. A summary of the workbook responses is included in Appendix 2.

Public meetings

To supplement the workbook process, the Commission held a series of public meetings in nine locations across the province. The public meetings were held between October 16 and December 3, 2003 and over 300 presentations were made. In addition, Commission members visited a number of schools across the province.

Submissions

In addition to presentations, the Commission received written submissions from a variety of individuals and organizations.

Through the public phase of the consultation process, the Commission frequently and consistently heard that:

- Funding is viewed as inadequate
- After funding, class size is the most serious concern
- Schools need adequate resources and support beyond just money
- A strong and balanced curriculum is critical
- Teachers are strongly supported, but many are struggling to meet the diverse and challenging needs of children in their classes
- More support is needed to achieve the best results from integrating children with special needs
- Choice is a strength of Alberta's education system, provided it does not detract from a strong public education system.

Listening to education stakeholders and experts

A key component of the review involved listening to and learning from those who are directly involved in Alberta's education system, including students, parents, teachers and school boards, superintendents and secretary treasurers, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, other education stakeholder groups, representatives of private and charter schools, and members of faculties of education. The Commission also appreciated the tremendous support, ideas and extensive information provided by the staff of Alberta Learning and other government departments.

In addition, the Commission was fortunate to be able to meet directly with a number of people with experience in education as well as experts not only in the field of education but also in areas as diverse as early childhood development and finance.

In terms of the advice from stakeholders and experts, the most common themes were that:

- Alberta has one of the best education systems in the world. We need to maintain and strengthen the system at a time when it is facing a number of challenges.
- The education system needs adequate and predictable funding.
- Schools are suffering from "mandate creep" - being expected to meet a wide range of students' needs that extend well beyond the education system.
- More attention should be paid to the early years so children come to school ready to learn.
- Without adequate support, there are serious challenges in integrating and providing appropriate programs for children with special needs.
- Class size is an issue but views on the best solutions differ.
- Roles, responsibilities and accountability should be clear for all those involved in the education system.
- Adequate funding needs to be in place to ensure that schools are properly maintained and regularly upgraded. Funding also needs to be available to build new schools where and when they are needed most.
- Teacher preparation and ongoing professional development are critical to continually improve Alberta's schools.
- Steps should be taken to restore and maintain peace on the labour relations front.

> *"Alberta's public education system currently shines brightly in Canada, North America and, indeed, on the world stage. Visitors come and marvel at our achievements. On the home front, however, there are some signs of discontent and doubt."*
>
> **College of Alberta School Superintendents (2002, p. 2)**

Consulting with students

Because students are at the heart of the education system, the Commission was anxious to hear their views on a number of issues. To facilitate this process, an independent consulting company was engaged to organize and facilitate targeted consultations with a cross section of Alberta students. The objective was to get feedback from current and recent high school students about their experiences in school and their recommendations for the future of the education system. Over 100 students participated in sessions held in Grande Prairie and Calgary in addition to those who participated in the public consultation process and public meetings.

From the students who participated in these sessions, the Commission heard:

- More counsellors and better information are needed.
- Students want their teachers not only to know the subject matter but also to be passionate motivators.
- Changes are needed, particularly in the Career and Life Management course.
- Class size is a concern, particularly with the increasing diversity of students.

Consulting with Aboriginal leaders and community members

The Commission was particularly concerned about the education of First Nations and Métis children.

To identify the key issues and seek advice on priority actions to take, the Commission met with a number of First Nations leaders and education directors, representatives of the Métis Nation and Métis Settlements, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and staff of Alberta Learning involved in Aboriginal education. In addition, the Commission also visited a number of schools for Aboriginal children.

Through these consultations, the Commission heard that:

- More study is not the answer - it's time for action. The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework developed by Aboriginal representatives and Alberta Learning is a good starting point.
- Little real progress will be made until Aboriginal parents and community members have more responsibility and accountability for the education of their children.
- There are isolated examples of good progress, but overall, the results are simply not good enough.
- Better linkages are needed between schools and parents.
- More Aboriginal teachers are needed.
- Improving the outcomes for Aboriginal children will bring tremendous benefits not only to Aboriginal children, their families and their communities, but also to the entire Alberta society.

> ***"Students care passionately about the state of their education system. In short, they expect the opportunity to learn the appropriate mix of skills and knowledge required to prepare for their futures beyond the classroom."***
>
> **GPC International (2003, p. 21)**

Undertaking research

From the outset, one of the clear expectations was that, to the extent possible, the Commission's recommendations would be guided by sound research. To tap into the latest trends and ideas and access the best available research, the Commission launched a comprehensive research program under the direction of a small research team.

Overall, roughly 400 articles, reports, studies and books were reviewed as part of the Commission's research program. A selected bibliography of the various articles, studies, and books reviewed by the Commission is included in Appendix 3. An independent review of the Commission's bibliography, undertaken by the Canadian Education Association, confirmed that the list of studies was comprehensive, current, and reflected reliable sources.[1]

To the extent possible, the Commission used the best research available to guide its recommendations. In some cases, the research evidence simply was not available and the Commission relied instead on its own judgment and the best advice from education stakeholders, experts, parents, students, and other Albertans.

What did the Commission learn from the process?

While the issues and ideas were as diverse as the education system itself, the Commission certainly heard several clear and consistent messages through its consultations.

- Albertans are strong supporters of our public education system and want to see it maintained and strengthened. They see education as vitally important to the future of Alberta's children and our province and something that deserves the strong support of all Albertans.
- Alberta has an outstanding education system, but people are worried we may be losing ground.
- Money is an issue and most people involved in the education system feel that funding is not adequate to meet current demands and expectations.
- Class size is a serious concern, especially among teachers and parents.
- Teachers, principals, superintendents and all those who work with children in Alberta's schools need to be thoroughly prepared for their jobs. Ongoing professional development is critical.
- Support for educating children with special needs - both financial and professional - is not sufficient. More needs to be done to coordinate and integrate services for children, many of which extend beyond the responsibilities of schools.
- It's important to start early and take steps to make sure children are ready for school.
- The education of Aboriginal children is not working well and the result is too many children and youth are being left behind.
- No one wants to see a repeat of the turmoil and tension caused by the teachers' strikes in 2002.

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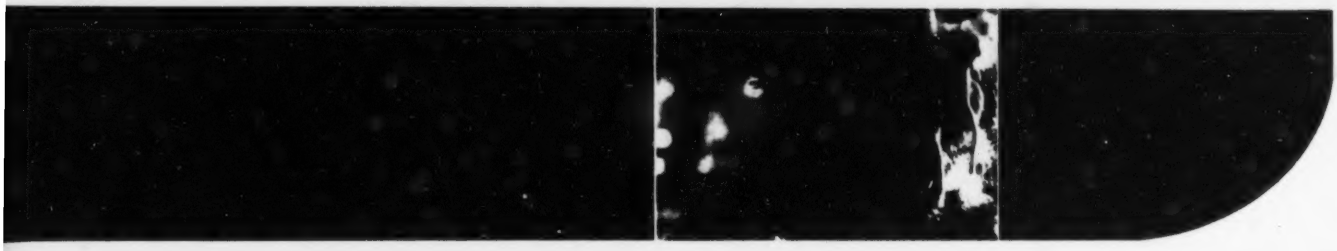
[1] Milton (2003)



Preparing recommendations

It was a privilege for Commission members to listen to the diverse views of Albertans and heartening to hear their strong support for education. The most difficult task for the Commission involved sorting through the wealth of ideas and information and developing recommendations for the future.

Throughout the process of developing its own recommendations, the Commission was guided by these criteria:

What good will come from this recommendation?

Will this be better for students?

Will this be better for the future of Alberta's education system?

The Commission was determined to keep its focus squarely on students and on the future. While many individuals and groups brought forward specific ideas related to short-term problems or issues, the Commission's view was that its primary responsibility was to take a longer term view - to step above the fray and to focus on the benefits that could come from focusing on students, first and foremost, and on setting a clear direction for the future.

Preparing for tomorrow

The Commission's primary purpose is to make recommendations for the future - to look beyond today's pressing issues and ask "what challenges are our schools likely to face and how can we make sure they're well prepared?"

To address those questions, it's important to set the context by looking at some of the trends that will affect our province and our country in the future. Predicting the future is a risky exercise at best. Many of us have heard the stories about predictions that look bizarre today but seemed like reasonable assumptions at the time - predictions like the amount of leisure time we'd have because of increasing technology or those who said there would never be much of a market for home computers.

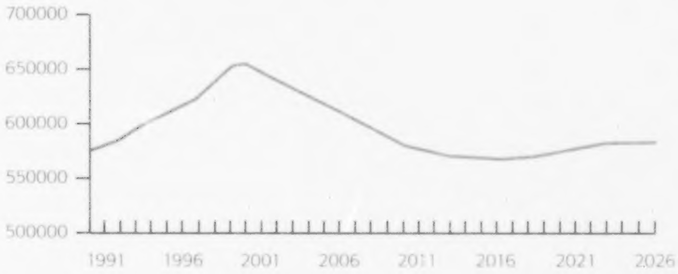
At the risk of making similar mistakes, there are important trends we can consider and some "best guesses" that can be made about the future of our schools and our province.

A changing population

Over the past five years, Alberta's population has grown faster than all other provinces. Projections are for Alberta's population to grow between 8% and 12.7% over the next ten years.[2] That will add at least 260,000 people to our province.

While the province is growing and the economy is strong, people might naturally expect a growing number of students. But projections show the opposite is likely to occur. Between 2000 and 2016, the school-aged population is actually projected to decline by close to 80,000 students or just over 12%. The primary reason for the decline is that, after the baby boomers' children have left school, the next generation is considerably smaller and has fewer children. Similar trends are evident in other Canadian provinces and in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. In some parts of the province, the declines are expected to be quite severe. It's possible that there will be more school-aged children as more people come to the province seeking careers and jobs, but it is unlikely this will offset declines that result from a lower birthrate.

Historical and projected school-age (4-18) population, Alberta, 1990-2026



Source: Demographic Division, Statistics Canada
Projections are based on medium growth assumption of fertility, mortality and migration.

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[2] Statistics Canada (2000).

Alberta's population also is aging, and that means fewer parents with children in school. In 2000, the number of Albertans aged 45 and over accounted for just over 31% of the population. By 2016, that percentage is expected to jump to almost 43%. At the same time, the percentage of people in their prime working years - from 25 to 44 years - is projected to drop from 33% in 2000 to just over 28% in 2016.

While our natural birth rate is low, Alberta is welcoming increasing numbers of people from other provinces and countries. In 2002, 26,470 Canadians moved to Alberta, the highest net in-migration of any province. Over the medium term, forecasts are for continued high levels of in-migration and, as a result, we can expect about 20,000 more people a year to come to the province from other parts of Canada.[3]

In terms of immigration, Alberta is the fourth largest immigrant-receiving province. Most of Alberta's immigrants come from China, the Philippines, India, Korea and Pakistan. Most are working age and more than half are skilled workers. They also are well educated; over 42% of Alberta's immigrants had a university degree. Most are destined for Calgary (60%) or Edmonton (30%). Approximately 3,800 or 26% of the total newcomers to Alberta in 2002 were school-aged children and youth.

We're also likely to see continuing shifts in where people live in the province. Contrary to what some might think, the number of people living in rural areas actually increased between 1991 and 2001 by close to 45,000. However, the number of people in urban communities is increasing at a much quicker pace. Over 374,000 more people now live in one of Alberta's cities compared to 1991 and almost 64% of Alberta's population lives in the two major cities of Edmonton and Calgary. There also is significant growth in suburbs and communities surrounding the two major cities. In contrast, many towns and villages are facing continuing signs of decline, with an aging population, local business closures, and more people choosing to leave for larger centres. Since 1995, Alberta's farm population has dropped from 40% to less than 7% of the total population in the province.

The population of Aboriginal people is growing much faster than the non-Aboriginal population - at a rate of almost 27% compared to 10% growth for the overall population. According to the latest information, about 156,000 people in Alberta (5.3% of the population) identified themselves as Aboriginal. More than three quarters of Aboriginal people live off reserve, mostly in cities. The Aboriginal population is also much younger. A third of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 14 and 8.7% of the children in Alberta are Aboriginal. There are over 52,000 school-aged First Nations children in the province. Looking ahead, the number of Aboriginal school-aged children is expected to continue to increase primarily because the birth rate is 1.5 times the birth rate for non-Aboriginal people.

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[3] Government of Alberta (2003a, p. 91).

Alberta's economy continues to grow

Throughout the 1990s, Alberta's economy was booming, growing at a rate of over 4% a year and far outpacing the rest of Canada. Most outlooks for the future point to continued strong growth. The province's most recent budget indicated that the economy is expected to grow by 3.6% in 2003 and by an average of 3.3% over the medium term.[4]

Combined with projections for continuing strong economic growth, forecasts are for 36,600 new jobs to be created in 2003. Alberta's unemployment rate is expected to drop to 4% by 2005 and to hover in the 4 - 5% range until 2010. We also have the highest labour force participation rate in the country and the second lowest rate of youth unemployment in Canada.[5]

While projections for strong economic growth and low unemployment are good news, there are growing signs that Alberta is facing a serious labour shortage. A recent report from the provincial government indicated that, "Labour shortages have been apparent for a while in some occupations, particularly in the information and communications technology and health care industries. What is new is that shortages are now occurring across a broad range of industries and occupations."[6] To reinforce the concern, a survey from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in 2002 found that 38,000 jobs in small- and medium-sized Alberta companies were unfilled simply because there weren't the qualified people needed to do the job.[7]

Looking ahead, projections show that education will become increasingly important to the future of Alberta's economy. As the province's economic development strategy *Get Ready Alberta* notes, knowledge and innovation are driving the market-place. Ideas and creativity are replacing machinery and equipment as the primary drivers of success. New jobs will go primarily to people who are well qualified. Nearly a third of all new jobs over the next five years will require college, technical and trades training and over a fifth of all new jobs will go to university graduates. In contrast, only about one in ten jobs will require less than a grade 12 education.[8]

In spite of the growing importance of education, only 65% of students complete high school within three years of entering grade 10 and 74% complete within five years. By the time people are between 25 and 34, 89% of them have completed high school in some form.[9] Only about 30% of grade 12 students entered full-time studies at post-secondary institutions the following year while another 4.7% entered a year later.[10] Additional information suggests that close to five in ten young Albertans go on to post-secondary education, lower than the Canadian average.[11] At the same time, Alberta has higher percentages of students taking part-time training and education and a significant number of students involved in apprenticeship programs.

In spite of the positive projections, there also are some potential risks to Alberta's economy. The first is that we will not have a sufficient supply of well-educated and highly skilled people to meet the needs, particularly as Alberta's economy becomes more diversified and knowledge-based. This point was highlighted in the April 2003 report from TD Economics on the Calgary-Edmonton Corridor. The report noted that, "The Corridor is vulnerable in the all-important areas of education and innovation. ... Alberta lags behind other provinces in the share of high school students moving on to post-secondary education, highlighting the region's reliance on luring well-educated individuals from other provinces for its pool of skilled workers."[12] There also continue to be uncertainties around the world that can affect North American and world markets.

To counter some of these potential risks, the province took steps in the spring of 2003 to establish a new Alberta Sustainability Fund. The Sustainability Fund is intended to reduce the impact of volatile provincial revenues and to provide stable, sustainable budgets. It protects priority areas like education from a potential downturn in the province's revenue but it also means that windfall profits are not available for spending on ongoing programs. The days of counting on windfalls to dramatically increase spending in priority areas, including education, are over.

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4 Ibid, p. 80. 5 Ibid, p. 81. 6 Government of Alberta (2001, p. 3). 7 Alberta Economic Development Authority (2003, p. 1). 8 Alberta Human Resources and Employment (2002). 9 Government of Alberta (2003b). 10 Alberta Learning (2002c, p. 47). 11 Bowlby & McMullen (2002, p. 46). 12 TD Economics (2003, p. 2).

The impact of information and technology is pervasive

Technology is literally changing the way people live, work and learn. Today, Alberta leads the country with the highest percentage of people with home computers. The introduction of SuperNet will put Alberta at the forefront in access to the Internet and the world wide web and open up a world of opportunities for communities, health authorities, businesses and schools.

Looking ahead, the explosion of new technologies and multimedia options is expected to continue. That means children and youth will come to school with different experiences and expectations than in the past. Most will have access to computers in their own homes and will be used to searching the web for information and entertainment. They will be used to seeing information presented through a wide range of different media with a combination of written words, sound and visual images. They will be able to instantly converse with their friends, here and around the world, not through the more traditional telephone but through chat rooms and Internet conversations.

Technology also is dramatically changing business and industry. While some jobs in the past required only minimal skills, today's workplace is highly demanding and there are very few jobs where young people would not be expected to use at least some technology, and in many cases, the technology is very advanced and complex. Increasingly, employers will expect the people they hire to be skilled in the use of computers as a basic starting point.

Against that backdrop, the traditional approach to teaching and learning involving a single teacher in a classroom, rows of desks, static textbooks, and primarily written assignments is changing as well. Computers are increasingly being integrated into the classroom. New software and e-learning packages are being developed. And teachers are increasingly using the potential of computers and related technology to engage their students and expand their learning.

At the same time, there is a growing need for teachers to guide the exploration and research of their students. The Internet opens the door to a wealth of information - good and bad - and teachers can play a vitally important role, along with parents, in helping students critically analyze sources of information, make positive choices and effectively use the tools technology provides.

On top of new technologies, the volume of information is expanding at an exponential rate. We're faced with a steady stream of new ideas, new information and new discoveries. While it may have once been possible to know everything there was to know about a given topic, that now is a fleeting dream. Given this reality, the importance of lifelong learning and learning how to learn is even more critical for individual Albertans and for our society as a whole.

Alberta's children and our society are changing

Along with a changing society, some suggest that Alberta's children are changing. Children in the so-called baby boom echo generation are described as:

- Open and accepting of inclusion and diversity
- Engaged in multi-tasking, focusing on a number of activities at the same time
- Curious and willing to experiment, capable of thinking and investigating
- Fiercely independent, self-reliant and assertive
- Discovery learners, who want customized, interactive, hands-on learning and learning that is fun
- Extensive users of technology
- Prepared for learning anywhere, anytime rather than simply during the school day.

The young people of tomorrow need to be prepared for multiple careers in their lifetimes. It's likely that they will live at home longer, possibly into their 20s, while they are still attending post-secondary education. They're also likely to want to see the benefits and value in what they're learning from high school education, post-secondary education and training.

Children today grow up in a mix of different families including traditional two-parent families, single-parent families, blended families or sadly, with no families at all. Children live in families where both parents work outside the home, where one parent is at home, or with parents who work in flexible work arrangements.

With increasing numbers of people coming to Alberta from other parts of the world, Alberta also is home to people with a wide range of cultural traditions, religions and languages. For schools, this means a rich diversity of children in school and increasing challenges to help children learn English and adapt to their school and community at the same time as they are trying to learn what's expected in the curriculum.

Aboriginal families, children and youth face special challenges. From the limited information we have, it's clear that the achievement results of Aboriginal children are significantly lower than provincial averages. Over half of Aboriginal people over the age of 15 have not finished high school while less than 10% have some university education. Slightly more than half of Aboriginal people in the province were employed in 1996. In terms of health, life expectancy for Aboriginal people is considerably lower than for non-Aboriginal people, more babies die at birth, rates of diabetes are higher than the rest of the population, and suicide rates for Aboriginal people are considerably higher. Aboriginal people are also three times as likely to be victims of violent crime and they are more likely to be involved with the justice system. Put all these statistics together and it paints a grim picture of the life too many Aboriginal people face in Alberta.

Not unlike other parts of the world, there are a number of health and social issues that are likely to affect children and Alberta's schools.

- A significant number of Alberta's children live in poverty. While the measures of poverty can vary, estimates are that just over 15% of children live in families with income below the poverty threshold (based on the Canadian Market Basket Measure). The primary concern is that poverty affects not only success at school but also overall health.
- Alberta's rate of youth crime is above the Canadian average but has been declining. Along with youth crimes, there are increasing concerns about bullying and discipline problems in schools.
- The number of young people who smoke increased substantially in the 1990s. Three out of ten young Canadians smoke. Across the country, people with less than a high school education are three times more likely to smoke than university graduates.
- A 2002 survey of Alberta's youth showed that most adolescents did not smoke, use cannabis or other drugs, nor did they gamble in the year before the survey. At the same time, the survey indicated that over half of adolescents drank alcohol at least once in the past twelve months. Close to 25% of youth in grades 10 - 12 said they smoked tobacco at least once in the past twelve months and just under 42% said they had used cannabis within the past twelve months.[13]
- The incidence of children with special needs is increasing for a variety of reasons. Medical advances mean more children with severe disabilities and health conditions are surviving at birth. Our ability to diagnose children's learning problems also has improved. In other cases, the reasons for increases in certain types of behavioural problems are largely unknown. A significant number of Alberta children also suffer from a range of mental illnesses. In the Capital Health region, for example, mental disorders, including depression, are the leading cause of hospitalization for children aged 10 - 14. The precise incidence of children with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is unknown but estimates are that between one and three of every 1000 babies born in Alberta have FAS. Two to three times as many children have fetal alcohol effect (FAE). Between a half and 80% of children born with FAE will experience some form of learning disability. (Given the fact that fetal alcohol can have a range of impacts on children, most now use the term "fetal alcohol spectrum disorder" to reflect the continuum of affects on children.)
- Today's children are not very active and we've seen alarming rates of obesity and diabetes that will affect the longer term health of our young people.

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[13] AADAC (2003)

What do these trends mean for the future of Alberta's schools?

Taken together, what conclusions can we draw about what the future might hold for Alberta's schools?

- Alberta's society and our economy will continue to evolve and change. Schools will need to be adaptable, flexible and able to respond to changes in their students, their communities, and their province.
- Expectations for Alberta to have an education system that is among the best in the world will continue. Students will be expected to achieve high standards in a demanding curriculum. Teachers will be expected to continually improve both their teaching practices and their students' results. School boards will be expected to provide exceptional leadership and respond to community expectations. And the provincial government will be expected to invest sufficient funds to guarantee an excellent education system.
- While Alberta's population will continue to grow, the number of children in school will decline. The result is that we'll continue to face problems of not having enough schools in the right places and too many schools in places where there aren't enough students.
- With a strong economy and more jobs demanding post-secondary education, there will be increasing pressure to keep students in school until they complete high school and to make sure they are well prepared to succeed at post-secondary education or in the workplace. The consequences of young people dropping out of school will be even more severe.
- Schools will continue to be expected to instill positive values in students and to prepare their students to be active, lifelong learners and contributing members of society.
- Diversity will be a hallmark of Alberta classrooms as schools welcome increasing numbers of children from other countries, traditions, languages and cultures.
- Schools will continue to struggle to meet their students' diverse needs especially as the number of children with special needs increases and expectations continue for children to be integrated to the extent possible in the regular classroom. On the positive side, a growing awareness of the need to address the diverse needs of children hopefully will mean better integration of services and the development of schools as centres of a wide range of services for children.

- There is and will continue to be an urgent need to improve the results for Aboriginal children and to ensure that all schools and teachers are prepared to address the unique needs of an increasing number of Aboriginal children in their classrooms.
- There will be a continuing emphasis on encouraging children to be healthy as our society understands that major illnesses like heart disease, diabetes and some cancers can be prevented by healthy and active lifestyles.
- Technology and multimedia will pervade all aspects of our lives. Children will be technologically savvy and expect their teachers to have similar skills. Although some may see technology today as an "add on" in schools - as one more thing that needs to be addressed - in fact, young people are fully familiar with technology and simply take it for granted in most aspects of their day-to-day lives. The same is true of the world of work. Schools can't get left behind or they risk losing the interest of students and the support of parents, business and the broader community.
- Schools will be expected to encourage students to become active and responsible citizens, willing to participate in community and volunteer activities and the democratic process.

Starting with a clear vision

We've listened to the advice of countless people who participated in the Commission's consultation process and we've looked at trends that are likely to affect our province and our schools in the future.

Before we get to the Commission's recommendations, it's important to begin with a clear understanding of what we want for Alberta's students, for schools and for the education system in general.

Important starting points

There are five key starting points that underlie the Commission's vision for the future of Alberta's education system.

The first is that Alberta has an outstanding education system. This was reinforced in comments and presentations throughout our consultations. Our results on national and international tests consistently put us at or near the top. We consistently heard about Alberta's excellent curriculum, capable teachers, and the continuing emphasis on innovation and improving outcomes for students. One of our province's greatest strengths is the fact that we have a strong public education system that is open to all children. Those strengths, however, don't mean we can be complacent and accept what we have as "good enough." It simply means we have a higher platform to spring from. We need to keep asking questions, assessing evidence and outcomes, and taking action to improve Alberta's education system. The objective is to build on today's successes and ensure nothing short of excellence in the future. To borrow the words of Jim Collins, the goal is to move from good to great.[14]

Second, education is the most important investment we can make as a society. Our education system not only shapes individual students' lives, it shapes the very nature of our society. A strong and vibrant public education system - a system that values each and every individual, instills positive values, and builds tolerance and respect - is critical to develop social cohesion and the kind of civil society Albertans want for the future.

The third point is that it's critical to look beyond the pressing issues of today and prepare for the future, whatever that future might hold. The world is continuing to evolve and change and Alberta's schools have gone through a number of changes as a result. It may be tempting to look at some of the latest buzzwords in the education field and assume that those ideas will still be current in the next five or ten years. But a better approach is to ensure that the education system remains flexible, resilient and able to anticipate and adapt to a changing environment. That means steering clear of prescriptive changes that might seem right today but will unnecessarily tie the hands of schools in the future and prevent them from responding to what will undoubtedly be a climate of continuing change.

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[14] Collins (2001).

The fourth point is that education will become even more important to individual Albertans, to their communities, and to our province as a whole, particularly because of the growing importance of skills, knowledge and ideas to the future of Alberta's economy and our society. Today, people talk about the importance of education. It's consistently rated as one of the top two priorities for Albertans and Canadians. And yet, too often, that implicit support is not translated into explicit action. Alberta's education system is too important to ignore. It will only remain one of the best systems in the world if we take deliberate action to keep it that way. That means all Albertans - not just those who have a direct stake in the education system - need to play an active role in their schools and their education system - asking questions, seeking answers, providing support and encouragement, and getting actively involved.

Finally, the most important point is that everything in the education system must start and end with children and youth. Schools are not there for teachers, for administrators or trustees. They're not there for parents, for businesses, or for governments. They're there for students. And the first and only criterion for judging the success of schools and the education system should be how well every child learns.

Setting a vision

With those starting points in mind, the Commission's vision for the future of Alberta's education system can be described as follows:

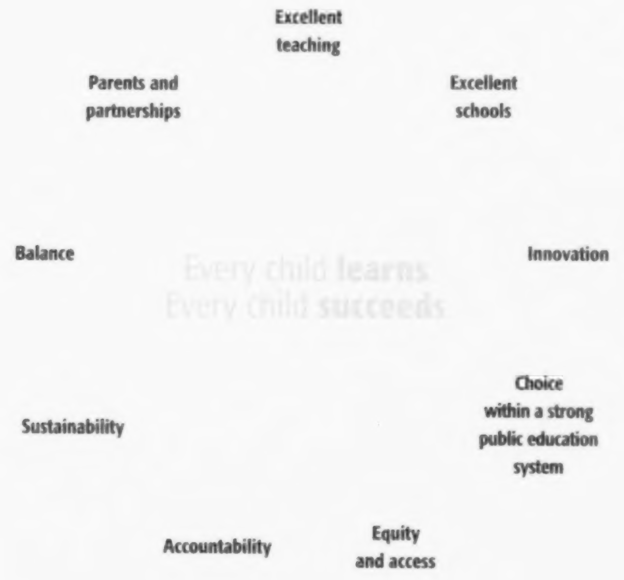
Every child **learns**.
Every child **succeeds**.

The entire focus of the education system should be on students and on ensuring the best possible education for every child. Each and every one of them should have every opportunity to succeed. Children should come to school well prepared and ready to learn. Steps should be taken to identify vulnerable and at-risk children long before they come to school and make sure they get support so they're ready to learn at school. Students should be actively involved and take more responsibility for their own learning. In addition to learning essential skills, especially literacy and numeracy skills, they should learn how to learn, how to seek ideas and information, how to collaborate with others, and how to apply what they learn.

As a result of their experience in school, we want students to be:

- Happy and healthy
- Thinking and caring citizens
- Able to judge ethical and moral issues and to make sound decisions
- Ready to continue learning or enter the workforce, with the skills and abilities they need to fulfill their own expectations and participate fully in Alberta's economy
- Respectful of themselves and others in the rich diversity of communities across the province
- Ready to participate actively in their communities and in shaping the future of their province, their country and the global community
- Ready to be lifelong learners.

Within that overall vision, nine key components help describe the education system we want to see in Alberta's future.


Excellent teaching
Parents and partnerships
Excellent schools
Balance
Every child learns
Every child succeeds
Innovation
Sustainability
Choice within a strong public education system
Accountability
Equity and access

Excellent teaching

Alberta's students should be taught by the very best and most capable teachers. All teachers should be well prepared to meet the challenge of their students' diverse needs, willing to embrace best practices, and constantly engaged in improving both how they teach and how well their students learn. They should work closely with each other, with parents, principals and others in the community to achieve the best results for their students. And they should get the support they need in the classroom to ensure that their students learn and succeed. Because of the essential work they do, teachers should be highly respected by their students, parents, and community members.

Excellent schools

Every school in Alberta should be an excellent school. That means every one of their students learns and succeeds. It means schools operate as professional learning communities with a single driving purpose - to continually improve the outcomes for their students. It means schools challenge their students to learn and achieve through inquiry, exploration and active participation in their own learning. They welcome parents and engage them in their children's education. They embrace and celebrate the diversity of students in their classes and in their community. High standards are set and achieved and results from continuous evaluation are used to improve outcomes for students. Technology is fully integrated and used as an effective tool for both teaching and learning. Excellent schools create a safe, positive and caring environment for every one of their students. They become centres of the community where a range of programs, facilities and services for children are available in one common location. Finally, excellent schools are places of respect, where all students are treated with unconditional respect and students are expected to respect themselves, their peers, their teachers, and all members of their community.

Innovation

The school system has to be ready for constant change. And that means being ready to embrace innovation - to continuously explore new thinking and new approaches to improve outcomes for students. Research, evaluation and evidence from successful initiatives and projects should be shared across the system and used to guide change. Major investments should continue to be made in educational research, particularly active, classroom-based research through the highly successful Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). Schools should be closely tied to centres of excellence in post-secondary education, research and development, and business, particularly in knowledge-based industries.

Choice within a strong public education system

A strong public education system must continue to be a cornerstone of Alberta's society. The public education system should continue to be the first choice for the vast majority of Alberta's students and their parents. At the same time, diversity and choice are positive features and add to the strength of the education system. Students should be able to choose different pathways and different ways of learning. Choices should continue to be available within and among public and separate schools, francophone schools, charter schools, private schools, alternative programs, distance learning, and home schooling. The only proviso is that the range of options outside the public system should not become so extensive that it detracts from the core of a strong public education system, willing and able to serve all students.

Equity and access

All students have a place in Alberta's school system, regardless of their background and abilities. Flexible programs and placements must be available for students and should be designed to meet students' needs and give them the best chance of success. For students with special needs, the options range from full integration to specialized programs, depending on the individual needs of individual students. There is no "one size fits all" solution. For students who are new to Canada or don't have English or French as their first language, programs and support should be available to help them adapt to their new home and school environment. Direct action should be taken to identify children who are at risk or vulnerable and make sure they have access to early interventions to improve their chances of success at school. True equity means children not only have equity in access to schools but they also have equity in outcomes. That means children get the help they need to be successful, to overcome obstacles, and to learn to the best of their abilities.

Accountability

Education is too important to simply assume things are going well. High standards must be set and met. An ongoing focus on accountability should ensure that sound information is available and used to guide continuous improvements in Alberta's education system. Students deserve honest feedback and ongoing assessment to help them improve their skills. Parents need clear information about the achievement of their children and what they can do to help them succeed at school. All the various players in the education system should have clear roles and responsibilities and should be held accountable for fulfilling those responsibilities. Teachers should be accountable for continually improving their students' achievement. School boards should continue to be accountable to their electors and to the province and should have the necessary flexibility and resources to meet their communities' expectations. The provincial government should be accountable to parents, students, and all Albertans for the overall quality of Alberta's education system and the results our students achieve. Finally, all Albertans invest in their education system and want the very best results for Alberta's children and youth. Open, complete and understandable information must be available about all aspects of the education system including policies, funding, results achieved, and all the various factors that affect student achievement.

Sustainability

Education is the best investment we can make in the future of our children and youth, our communities, and our province. Adequate, long-term, predictable and sustainable resources have to be available to achieve the vision set out in the Commission's report. At the same time, those resources must be used wisely and effectively to produce the best outcomes for students.

Parents and partnerships

The first partners in the education system are parents. For children to succeed, parents must be actively and positively involved in the education of their children. Every school should have a school council that provides a strong voice and an effective vehicle for parents and community members to be actively involved in important decisions about their schools. All partners in the learning system - teachers, parents, administrators, support staff, school boards, government, community and business members - should work together to ensure that children receive the best possible education. That means all partners are treated with trust and respect. It means that the walls that sometimes exist between schools and their communities are taken down and schools are recognized as centres of learning, community activity and identity. It also means that schools become the centre of well-coordinated and integrated services for children provided by a range of government and community agencies and organizations.

Balance

The education system should continue to balance a number of forces and factors. There needs to be a careful balance between clear province-wide policies and direction and local flexibility to meet students' needs and community expectations. There needs to be a balance between what parents and communities expect and what schools can reasonably deliver. There needs to be a balance between the roles, authority and power of different stakeholders in the education system including parents, teachers, trustees and the province.

Perhaps most importantly, the education system has to balance what aboriginal cultures describe as the four essential aspects of life - the mental or intellectual aspect, the spiritual aspect, the emotional aspect, and the physical aspect. Just as in a medicine wheel, when these four dimensions are in balance for individuals, for schools, and for the system as a whole, we will be able to achieve the vision of excellence and success for every child.

Turning vision into reality

We know what we want from Alberta's education system. We want every child to learn and every child to succeed.

The words sound simple enough, but how do we take that vision and turn it into a reality for every child in the province?

From the Commission's perspective, deliberate and concerted action is needed in eight key areas:

1. ***Ready to learn*** - Making sure all children come to school ready to learn. That means actions are taken early, by their parents and by all the adults involved in children's lives, to ensure that all children get a positive and healthy start in their lives, and to identify and address potential problems before children come to school.
2. ***What students learn*** - Maintaining a world-class curriculum and ensuring that students learn the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to succeed in learning, in the workplace, and in life.
3. ***The schools we need*** - Developing excellent schools - schools with a compelling drive to improve students' outcomes, ensure they learn to the best of their abilities, and help them become confident, capable and productive individuals, prepared to pursue their goals and contribute to society.
4. ***Success for every child*** - Adapting programs and providing support so that all children, including Aboriginal children, children with special needs, children new to Canada, and children who have special gifts and talents, get every opportunity to succeed in school.
5. ***Making the grade*** - Setting high standards and ensuring they are met through ongoing assessment, improvements and accountability.
6. ***Technology plus*** - Not just learning about technology or adding computers to schools but learning with technology and making sure a range of technologies is fully integrated and used as powerful tools for both teaching and learning.
7. ***Excellent teachers and school leaders*** - Ensuring that every child is taught by capable and caring teachers and every school is led by an outstanding principal.
8. ***Good governance*** - Providing thoughtful and capable governance, positive labour relations, and engaging the various partners in education in an environment of mutual trust and respect.

It goes without saying that, to succeed in each of these areas, sufficient resources must be available. In many cases, the necessary resources are already in place in schools and school jurisdictions across the province. In others, additional resources may be necessary. Wherever possible, the Commission has estimated the costs of its recommendations and provided those estimates in the section following our recommendations.

Ready to learn

We've all heard about the importance of getting off to a good start, but for children, research consistently shows that nothing is more important for their futures than getting a healthy and positive start in life.

What happens to children in their first few years of life has a profound influence on their relative success or failure in school and in life in general. It is a critical time when their brains are developing and the foundation for future learning, behaviour and health is being formed. Studies suggest that, during their early years, children need positive stimulation, good nutrition and a nurturing environment for optimal brain development. Those essentials, combined with positive involvement of parents, bonding with mothers, and quality early childhood development programs can provide lasting benefits for every child. In fact, success at almost every stage in life - from achievement in school to success in post-secondary education, employment and family life - depends on what happens in the early years. Investments of time, support, love and attention in a child's first few years of life pay off in personal achievement and happiness, better health, more productivity, and less dependence on community support.

In an article prepared for the World Bank, Dr. Fraser Mustard suggests that, "The emerging understanding of the influence of the social and physical environment (water quality, secure physical environment, good nutrition, and excellent nurturing) in the early years of human development on risks for physical and mental health problems and competence and coping skills in adult life has led to proposals that investments in mothers and children will reduce inequalities in development and health in adult life. This knowledge, coupled with the increasing evidence that the early period of child development affects cognition, learning, and behavior in the later stages of life ... is creating a broader consensus about the fundamental importance of the early years of development."[15]

The importance of a child's early years is reinforced in studies done by Willms and others using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth. Willms concludes that, "Children who do not get a good start in life have difficulties rebounding and achieving their full potential. Thus, the support of families in the effort to provide the best possible environments for children is a critical investment."[16] He also concludes that, "Taken together, these strands of research provide compelling evidence that care and stimulation during the early years are critical to establishing a foundation for learning, behaviour, and health over the life cycle."[17]

Studies from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that policy makers in countries around the world increasingly recognize that "equitable access to quality early childhood education and care can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and support the broad educational and social needs of families."[18] The trend in all countries included in their study of early childhood education is toward at least two years of early childhood education provided before children begin school. They also suggest that good quality early childhood development programs should be part of an integrated approach to meeting the needs of children and should have strong links to the education system. All children should have access to quality programs, with particular attention to children in need of special support.

The importance of providing quality early childhood development programs is particularly important for children who are considered to be at risk. This is supported by key longitudinal studies in the US that have tracked the impact of interventions in the early years of at-risk children's lives on their subsequent success in school and in their communities. For example, an important Michigan study on the Perry Preschool program tracked the progress of 123 at-risk African American children for almost three decades following their participation in high-quality, active learning preschool programs.

> ***"Success tomorrow often depends on preventative measures today."***
>
> **Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 18)**

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[15] Mustard (2002, pp. 23-24). [16] Willms (2002, p. 331). [17] Ibid, p. 364. [18] OECD (2001b, p. 7).

> *"We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults nor can we wait until they reach school - a time when it may be too late to intervene."*[22]
>
> Dr. J. Heckman (2000)

The results showed that, compared with children who did not participate in the pre-school programs, by the time the participants were aged 27 they had:

- Significantly higher monthly earnings
- Significantly higher percentages of home ownership
- A significantly higher level of schooling completed
- A significantly lower percentage of participants receiving social services
- Significantly fewer arrests, including significantly fewer arrests for crimes of drug making or dealing.[19]

Similar results were found in two other key studies in the US. All three studies point to a significant return on investment to society when high-quality early childhood development programs are provided by capable and well-trained teachers. In the Perry Preschool program, the cost of the program was $12,000 per child while the estimated value of the benefit to the individual involved and to society as a whole was estimated at $108,000. The Abecedarian program provided full-day year-round programs for at-risk children in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The cost of that program was estimated at $33,486 per child and the benefit to society was estimated at $122,528.[20] The third example comes from Child Parent Centres in Chicago where half-day programs were provided on a large scale in Chicago public schools, again with the focus on children at risk. In this case, the cost of the program was $7,000 and the estimated benefit to society was $48,000.[21]

It is important to note that the benefits come not just from simply identifying at-risk children and putting them in programs when they are young. The positive involvement of parents and the quality of the program are critically important as are the abilities and training of the people who teach these programs.

The key objective for the Commission is to ensure that all children come to school ready to learn. While a child's early years may be beyond the mandate of the Commission's work, there is little doubt from the extensive research we reviewed that ignoring the early years and focusing on fixing problems when children come to school is a short-sighted and wrong-headed approach. As Nobel prize-winning economist J. Heckman notes, "We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults nor can we wait until they reach school - a time when it may be too late to intervene."[22]

In fact, the best way of achieving success for every child is to ensure that every child gets a healthy and positive start in life and every child comes to school ready and eager to learn.

This is particularly true for vulnerable children and children who are at risk. When we think of at-risk children, we typically think of those who live in poverty. In fact, research suggests that this is a misconception. Vulnerable children - children who do not achieve learning and behavioural outcomes appropriate for their age - come from all different types of families and the majority comes from families whose income is above the poverty line. If we take a broader look at vulnerable children in Canada, research suggests that at least one out of every four Canadian children is vulnerable.[23]

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19 Schweinhart et al. (1993, p. xv). 20 Masse & Barnett (2002, p. 161). 21 Reynolds et al. (2002, p. 24).
22 Heckman (2000, p. 50). 23 Willms (2002, p. 335).

While all children deserve a positive start in life, the Commission feels strongly that more must be done to address the needs of vulnerable and at-risk children, to head off problems before they come to school and to improve the chances for every child to succeed in school and in life. In the longer term, the benefits will come not just to individual children but to our society as a whole through reduced poverty, better health outcomes, and a better educated population.

Early in 2003, the Premier launched a major initiative called Alberta's Promise. Participants in the initiative "promise to be partners with our neighbours, heroes to our children and champions of their future." The Commission strongly supports this initiative and commends the government for setting a clear goal of making "Alberta the best place in the world to raise our children."[24]

With the actions recommended by the Commission, we believe strongly that all partners in Alberta's education system can become heroes to our children and champions of a positive future for every child in the province.

Goals

- **All children come to school ready to learn.**
- **Schools are ready to accept children and adapt their programs to make sure children can learn and succeed.**
- **Children's needs are identified early and proactive steps are taken to address potential problems before they come to school.**
- **Parents are actively engaged in the early development of their children, have the support they need to create a positive environment for their children, and develop strong links with schools in their communities.**
- **Government has a strong commitment to the success of every child and provides a comprehensive, integrated approach to supporting children's early years.**

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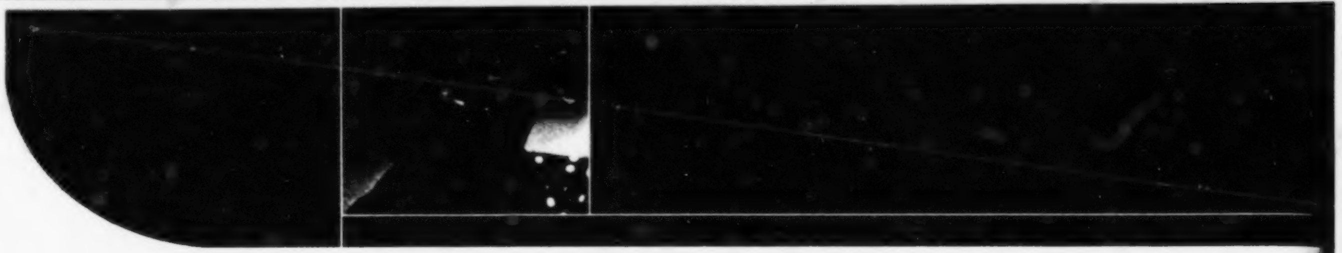
[24] Alberta's Promise web site including quote from Mrs. Colleen Klein.



"Parents are the primary and lifelong teachers and role models for children."

Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (2002, p. 2)

Recommendations

Support the role of parents

1. Establish parenting centres in communities across the province with close links to elementary schools.

Parents are their children's first teachers. The role they play in their children's early lives and throughout their years in school is vitally important to their children's success and to the future of our society.

Parenting is an awesome responsibility. As Willms notes, "The research indicates that the important factors are parenting skills, the cohesiveness of the family unit, the mental health of the mother, and the extent to which parents engage with their children..."[25] The vast majority of parents provide engaging, positive, stable and stimulating homes for their children. But there are times when even the most capable and caring parents have questions about how to respond to changing behaviours of their children and frequently don't know where to turn for support and advice. Young parents who had difficult childhoods have few places to turn for advice on how to provide positive experiences for their own children. With changes in Alberta's families and a highly mobile population, extended families or multi-generational and community supports often are not in place or are not well known by many young families.

Parenting centres would fill this gap. Ideally linked to elementary schools, these centres would provide a trusted place for parents to go for support and advice. They would provide a range of parenting activities, early childhood development opportunities for children, home visits, and early identification of problems. The centres would operate primarily as drop-in centres where parents could come to seek advice, discuss issues with other parents, and get referred to specialist services as necessary. The centres would not provide day care for children but would provide a place for parents to learn about positive parenting activities and expand their understanding of their children's development while their children are engaged in constructive activities that sow the seeds for future learning. They also would provide an early, positive link among parents, children and schools and help ease the transition for children when they enter kindergarten or grade 1.

While the goal would be to have parenting centres available to all parents in the province, the first priority should be establishing parenting centres in communities where there are significant numbers of children at risk. In other communities, schools, community agencies, and parents should work together in a cooperative way to establish parenting centres.

Funding for parenting centres should be provided by the province and coordinated through a cross-government initiative including Children's Services, Learning, Health and Wellness, Human Resources and Employment, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Funds should be administered either through Children and Family Services Authorities or through local school boards.

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[25] Willms (2002, p. 366).

Parenting centres ...

- Ensure every child has positive early development and learning opportunities, regardless of family circumstances
- Create a strong base for children to succeed at school and throughout life
- Help promote family literacy and numeracy skills
- Support responsive, nurturing parenting, and good nutrition for children in a safe and caring environment
- Respond to the changing nature of families, especially in cases where traditional support is not available from extended families and friends
- Help identify problems early and provide intervention, linking children and families to other professional services and programs.

Adapted from a description by Mary Gordon, *Roots of Empathy*

Expand kindergarten programs

2. Establish new junior kindergarten programs on a phased-in basis.

Around the world, most developed countries are moving towards two years of kindergarten programs before children start grade 1. While many parents may want to give their children a good start by involving them in junior kindergarten programs, the first priority should be on making sure at-risk children have access to junior kindergarten programs targeted at meeting their needs and ensuring they come to school ready to learn. This should build on programs and initiatives already in place in the province such as Program Unit Funding for young children with severe disabilities, head start programs, and early intervention programs supported by a number of government departments. Over time, as resources and school space permit, junior kindergarten programs should be available for all children.

Junior kindergarten programs should:

- Be an integral part of the school system and included in the School Act. Parents should have the option of sending their children to junior kindergarten programs.
- Be primarily half-day programs, but full-day programs should be available for at-risk children.
- Ideally be available for all children from the age of four, but given limitations on resources and space, the first priority should be on providing junior kindergarten for at-risk children.

> ***"Comprehensive early intervention programs for 'at-risk' students must be provided, with appropriate resourcing to ensure that all children come to school with the capacity to learn."***
>
> **College of Alberta School Superintendents (2002, p. 3)**

"Investing in full-day kindergarten or programs for three- and four-year olds can give kids the head start they need to catch up with their peers."

Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 18)

- Be taught by certificated teachers with expertise and training in early childhood education.
- Focus on developmentally appropriate programs, using play as a constructive way of encouraging active learning, promoting positive socialization with other children, and preparing children for the rigours of school.
- Have clear goals and curriculum expectations.
- Be delivered directly by school jurisdictions or through arrangements with private or community-operated early childhood development centres; approved independent schools should also be able to provide junior kindergarten programs.

3. Establish full-day kindergarten programs.

Currently, kindergarten programs are not included as part of the School Act, although most school jurisdictions provide kindergarten programs. The program is not mandatory but about 95% of Alberta's children attend a kindergarten program before they go to school. Currently, most kindergarten programs are provided on a half-day basis.

Research suggests that there are numerous positive benefits from full-day kindergarten programs. A report done for the Calgary Board of Education summarized previous research on full-day kindergarten programs. It concluded that:

- A developmentally appropriate full-day program benefits children academically and socially - especially children from low socio-economic or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds
- Teachers preferred full-day to half-day programs
- Parents reacted favourably to the full-day schedule
- Full-day kindergarten may reduce the long-term costs for special and remedial education.

The report goes on to say that, "... All studies indicated a positive relation between participation in full-day kindergarten and subsequent school performance. Higher achievement in academic development as well as greater growth in social and behavioural development is consistently reported ... All studies reviewed here suggest that a full-day developmentally appropriate kindergarten program is especially beneficial to children from low socioeconomic levels and/or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds."[26]

Similar results have been shown in a variety of studies in the United States. For example, a comparison of full-day and half-day programs in 13 schools with comparable location, size and student characteristics showed that full-day students out-performed half-day students in reading, language skills, mathematics and in all areas of early school assessment. Parents of children in full-day programs were also more satisfied with the program and believed it increased the chances of success in grade 1. Teachers also supported the program and believed it gave them more time to explore the curriculum.[27]

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[26] Blades (2002, pp. 8 - 10). [27] Hough & Bryde (1996, p. 16).

In Edmonton, full-day kindergarten programs in 15 schools have shown similar positive results for children at risk. A recent study showed that at-risk children began kindergarten with lower levels of reading and writing skills but, after participating in full-day kindergarten, they were able to catch up with other children. As Dr. José da Costa, the author of the study noted, "These children came into the kindergarten program at a huge disadvantage. By the end of the school year, the children who had been receiving the full-day programming had narrowed the gap to the point that there were no differences between them and the other kids."[28]

Similar results were found in the Northern Lights School Division. Through an Alberta Initiative for School Improvement project, a full-day kindergarten program was introduced with the goal of teaching students how to learn and how to be more independent learners. About 70% of the Division's kindergarten students took part in this program. At the beginning of the full-day kindergarten program, 24% of the students were identified as having special needs. By grade 1, teachers identified only 9% of students as needing assistance to meet or exceed the grade 1 goals. This suggests that the full-day kindergarten program was successful in addressing the early disadvantage of many of the children involved.[29]

Based on these positive benefits, the Commission's view is that kindergarten programs should:

- Be established as an integral part of the school system and included in the School Act.
- Be mandatory for all children to attend.
- Be provided by school jurisdictions, approved Early Childhood Services operators, approved independent schools, or through home schooling.
- Be available on a full-day basis, ideally for all children, but as a first priority, for at-risk children.
- Be available for all children at the age of five and with a consistent starting age across the province.
- Be taught by certificated teachers with training in early childhood education.
- Be eligible for grants for English as a second language or French language upgrading students.
- Follow a provincially-mandated program with clear goals and curriculum objectives and focused on early literacy and numeracy skills.
- Provide for a smooth transition from kindergarten to grade 1.

Because of the challenges involved in providing full-day kindergarten programs, especially in rural communities, school jurisdictions should have flexibility in how programs are organized and delivered.

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[28] da Costa & Bell (2003). Quoted in the Edmonton Journal, June 22, 2003, p. A18.
[29] Northern Lights School Division (2002).

Coordinate services for children

4. Ensure better coordination of programs for children provided by the provincial government and at the community level.

Currently, a number of different government departments are involved directly or indirectly in providing programs and support for children including Children's Services, Learning, Health and Wellness, Justice, Solicitor General, Human Resources and Employment, Community Development, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Considerable work already is underway through the cross-ministry Alberta Children and Youth Initiative and specific projects such as the Student Health initiative. This work should continue and be expanded to include a review of current education and professional development programs for professionals involved in early education and child care and actions to promote dialogue among parents, early childhood educators, and child care providers.

While good work is underway to coordinate and integrate services through the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, the Commission also heard that this work is not well known across ministries or reflected in communities where the actual delivery of services occurs. Better integration of services within government has to be mirrored in the actual delivery of coordinated programs and services in the community. Steps should be taken to ensure close links among school jurisdictions and schools, regional health authorities, Child and Family Services Authorities, and a wide range of community agencies funded through Family and Community Support Services grants. Recommendations later in this report (in the section on "The schools we need") underscore the importance of schools becoming integrated centres for a wide range of services for children provided by a number of different organizations and community agencies.

> *"... responsibility for the care and education of students does not begin and end at the classroom door. A coordinated effort on the part of education, social services, health and justice agencies is essential."*
>
> Alberta Teachers' Association (2002, p. 14)

What children learn

Alberta is known nationally and internationally for its well-developed, challenging and comprehensive curriculum. Clearly, this is one of the key strengths of the province's education system.

At the same time, the world is changing rapidly. Knowledge is growing at an exponential rate. Technology is changing how people learn, work and do business. And the ability of today's children to meet the challenges of tomorrow will depend very much on what they learn, how well they learn it, and how well they can use and shape their knowledge and skills in an increasingly competitive environment.

To meet these challenges, Alberta must maintain a curriculum that is at the leading edge, constantly changing and adapting, and preparing children and young adults for a changing and demanding world.

As outlined in the Commission's vision, the curriculum must help develop the full potential and unique gifts of each and every child. It must prepare them for further learning, for work and for life. It must develop active and participating citizens who understand and respect the diversity of our many cultures, our traditions of the past, and our potential for the future. It must prepare the future leaders of our society - young men and women who are ready to tackle the most pressing problems in our society and shape the future by the actions they take.

This is no simple task. It involves much more than determining what facts and information students should be expected to know at different grades and by the time they finish school. Instead, it requires careful thought about the outcomes we want for all students and matching those with the best content and teaching approaches. And it means constantly adapting and improving curriculum to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Throughout its consultations, the Commission heard very few concerns about Alberta's curriculum. In fact, it was identified as one of the education system's greatest strengths. The Commission did hear concerns about the pace of curriculum change, the need for adequate support when new curriculum is introduced, and the tendency for the curriculum to become crowded with more and more topics and information. Consistent with concerns about growing expectations for schools, it seems that every time there is an issue in our society, the solution lies in teaching children about it in school. With a limited number of hours in the day, there simply isn't enough time to pack the curriculum with every topic people would like our schools to cover.

Based on our review, the Commission concludes that Alberta's curriculum is basically sound, aside from adjustments in some areas. Furthermore, the Commission does not presume to be experts in curriculum development and design - those matters are more properly left to people who are. Instead, the Commission's focus is on making sure we have the right outcomes and expectations in place. Leading edge curriculum can then be designed to make sure students have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in post-secondary education, in their careers, and in their personal lives.

> ***"Much of the present strength of Alberta's education system can be attributed to the successful development and implementation of a strong provincial curriculum, a curriculum that has provided a model for other jurisdictions."***
>
> **Alberta Teachers' Association (2002, p. 21)**

Goals

Every child is able to read and understand and apply basic mathematics concepts by the time he or she leaves grade 3.

90% of students complete high school within four years of starting grade 10.

Students leave school well prepared to succeed at a variety of post-high school studies and training, in their careers and their communities.

Alberta's curriculum constantly evolves to reflect the realities of a rapidly changing world.

Alberta's young people leave school with outcomes and achievements that are second to none.

Young people leave the education system ready to think, reason, apply their knowledge, and become caring and compassionate citizens.

Recommendations

Expect clear outcomes and values

5. Ensure that clear outcomes and expectations continue to be in place and supplement those outcomes with a set of values to be reinforced and reflected in all schools.

The Commission's vision is to ensure that every child learns and every child succeeds. Success can be defined in many terms, but from the Commission's perspective, it means that, by the time they leave school, young people have achieved the expected outcomes of a basic education to the best of their abilities.

A set of outcomes has been developed by Alberta Learning and it is used to guide the development and continuous review of curriculum. Consistent with those outcomes, the Commission's view is that we should expect graduates of Alberta's schools to be able to:

- Demonstrate effective and appropriate communication skills
- Demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in a number of key areas including literacy, mathematics, science, social studies and history, languages and the fine arts
- Demonstrate a range of technological skills
- Use critical and creative thinking and reasoning skills to solve problems and make decisions
- Take personal responsibility and behave as responsible and contributing citizens
- Understand global issues, conditions and relationships

- Identify their own strengths and talents in order to explore career options and opportunities
- Participate in a healthy and active lifestyle
- Continue as lifelong learners throughout their lives and careers
- Adapt comfortably to change, be able to manage complexity, think independently, and respect diverse points of view
- Work effectively as an independent worker or a member of a team.

In addition, the Commission believes that schools play an important role, along with parents and community members, in modeling and reinforcing essential values and preparing students to be productive and contributing citizens. In partnership with parents and communities, we expect schools to reinforce certain values in every child, including:

- **Respect** - treating themselves and others with courtesy, dignity and positive regard, honouring the rights of others, and treating people's belongings, our environment, and the world around us with consideration
- **Responsibility** - being accountable for their actions and following through on their commitments
- **Honesty** - behaving in a sincere, trustworthy and truthful manner
- **Empathy** - appreciating the emotions of others, demonstrating concern for their feelings, and trying to understand issues from others' perspectives even though they may not agree with them personally
- **Fairness** - being sensitive to the needs of each individual, treating others as they wish to be treated themselves, interacting with others without stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination, and standing up for human rights
- **Initiative** - acting without the need to be prompted by others, eager to do what needs to be done and ready to take the first step in achieving a goal
- **Perseverance** - sticking to a goal and working hard even in the face of obstacles and challenges
- **Courage** - facing challenges directly, seeking help from others when it's needed, doing the right thing even when it's unpopular, recognizing risks and danger and making wise choices
- **Integrity** - ensuring truthfulness, sincerity and consistency in what they believe, what they say and how they behave
- **Optimism** - maintaining a positive attitude, looking on the brighter side, seeing opportunities in the face of adversity, and having hope for the future.[30]

To achieve these outcomes and attributes, it is important to arrange the curriculum and set objectives that are appropriate for the age and abilities of students as they progress through the school system.

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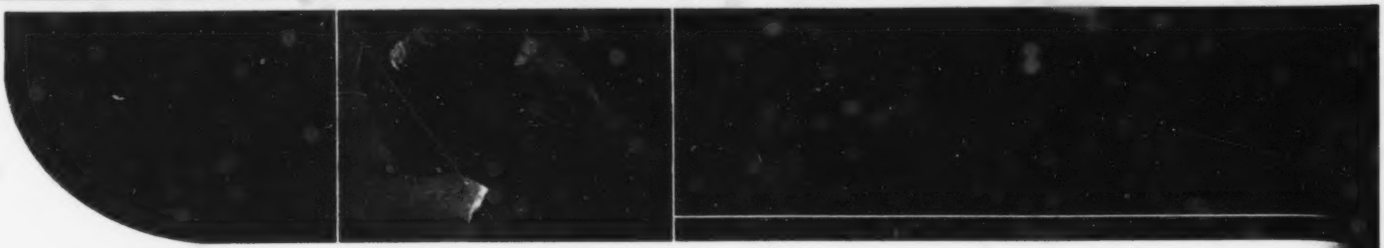
[30] Adapted from North York Region District School Board, Character Education: Cultivating Positive Attributes.



Junior kindergarten to grade 3

The focus should be primarily on literacy, numeracy and social skills. Subject areas such as social studies, science, fine arts and physical education should be integrated across the curriculum rather than taught as separate subjects. As outlined in the previous section, steps should be taken to ensure that all children come to school ready to learn. Smooth transitions should be in place for children as they move from junior kindergarten through regular kindergarten and into grade 1. Grade 3 is a critical turning point for children. By the time they leave grade 3, children should be able to read and demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills. Reading is critically important. As some have said, until about the age of eight, children learn to read. After that, they read to learn. A new wellness stream should also be introduced to promote good health and physical activity in the early years and continue on through grade 12.

Grades 4 - 6

Students should be expected to build on the skills learned in the early grades and develop more complex thinking skills through core subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Children should learn about the importance of healthy and active lifestyles through a new wellness program combining aspects of the current health and physical education programs. All students at this age should participate in fine arts programs and have opportunities to learn second languages in addition to English. Students should not be streamed on the basis of their achievements.

Grades 7 - 9

There are special challenges at this stage as young people are going through many changes. The Commission heard concerns that this is the time when students are most at risk of losing interest or making decisions that eventually lead to their dropping out of school. First and foremost, junior high school should help students not only achieve the objectives of the curriculum but also maintain their motivation, help them understand themselves and others, make healthy choices, and set the stage for success in high school. This is a critical stage in young people's lives and they need positive support from all the adults in their lives, not only those in school.

The curriculum should challenge students to expand their knowledge and skills in core areas such as language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. It should stress the relevance of what they are learning to real-life situations and future choices they might make about further education and careers. Since this is a time when young people begin experimenting and making lifestyle choices, they should have a good understanding of the importance of healthy and active lifestyles. A new wellness program is vitally important at this stage and should be designed to engage students in physical activity and address the many health and lifestyle issues they face. Students also should have opportunities to continue experiences in the fine arts and second languages.

Beyond those important areas, students should begin to explore various technologies, careers and apprenticeship programs through career and technology studies, post-secondary exploration, and other types of work experience and career exploration. More emphasis should be placed on making young people aware of all the opportunities that exist, including opportunities in highly skilled trades.

Counselling services are vitally important at this stage in young people's lives, and every student should have access to personal and career counselling during his or her junior high school years.

Grades 10 - 12

In high school, students make choices that will affect the rest of their lives. They need consistent adult support from teachers, their parents, and significant adults in their lives. Students should have access to counselling to assist them in assessing their own talents, skills and preferences and making appropriate choices about different paths to take.

Within each of the major subject areas, a range of levels should continue to be available to meet the needs of different students. The current requirements for all students to take courses in English and social studies through to the end of grade 12 should be maintained. In addition, a new wellness program should combine the current aspects of physical education, health and Career and Life Management (CALM) and be designed to encourage physical activity and healthy choices, address a number of issues of concern to young people such as drug and alcohol abuse, as well as issues such as personal finance, paying for post-secondary education, life and career planning, parenting, relationships, and conflict resolution. All students should have opportunities to continue their studies in the fine arts and to gain an appreciation of the importance of arts and culture in our society. Study of second languages should also continue at this level.

Students should have a range of opportunities to explore and develop skills in career-related areas through a revised and re-focused Career and Technologies Studies program and leading-edge vocational and trades programs. When students leave grade 12, they should be armed with appropriate skills and comprehensive information about the choices they can make for post-secondary education and future careers in the workforce.

Maintain and improve Alberta's world-class curriculum

6. Maintain and continuously improve Alberta's comprehensive and balanced curriculum with:

- **An ongoing emphasis on core areas such as language arts, mathematics, social studies and science**
- **Opportunities for students to gain an appreciation of the fine arts, learn languages in addition to English, maintain active and healthy lifestyles, explore emerging careers, and develop specific career-related skills.**

Alberta has a world-class, centralized curriculum and the result is that our students rate with the best in the world in key areas such as language arts, science and mathematics. As noted earlier, the Commission heard strong support for Alberta's current curriculum and the balanced mix of programs it provides. The strength of the province's curriculum is thanks to strong leadership by Alberta Learning combined with the active involvement of key education partners, especially classroom teachers, in the development, field testing and revision of curriculum.

The Commission sees no need to make substantial changes to a program of studies that has proven to be successful.

There is a concern, however, that the curriculum can become overloaded with a wide range of topics and growing expectations that extend beyond what is reasonable given the time available in the school year. To make the most of students' time in school and ensure that the outcomes identified by the Commission are achieved, the program of studies should continue to provide a balanced mix of core subjects along with the development of knowledge and skills in fine arts, languages, careers, and healthy lifestyles. It should ensure that students gain a full understanding of Alberta and Canadian history, our society, and our position in the world. When new issues and priorities arise, consideration should be given to replacing existing areas in the curriculum rather than simply adding more content and more objectives to what is already a packed curriculum.

The Commission also heard concerns about the pace of change in the curriculum. Continually reviewing and revitalizing the curriculum is essential to ensure that it is leading edge and meets the changing needs of students, our society and our economy. At the same time, the Commission believes that the pace of change should be reasonable in order to avoid overloading schools and teachers with the challenge of implementing too much new curriculum at the same time. Classroom teachers, school jurisdictions, post-secondary representatives, parents, experts, members of the community, and business representatives should continue to be involved directly in the process of reviewing and revising curriculum. Curriculum should continue to be designed so that students achieve a deeper and broader understanding as they move from one grade to the next. Because of the pervasive impact of technology on student's personal lives and their careers, technology should be fully integrated as a teaching and learning tool.

The Commission also identified two areas where concerns have been expressed and actions are needed.

Fine arts -
All students should have opportunities to learn and experience the fine arts at all levels in the education system.

Fine arts programs should be considered integral to every child's education. They provide not only the opportunity for children to explore and develop their creative abilities, but also to experience a range of activities that are vitally important to the quality of life Albertans enjoy. Evidence also suggests that learning in the fine arts can complement and enhance learning in other areas of the curriculum.[31]

Ideally, students should have opportunities to learn and study a variety of fine arts from drama and dance to art and music at every level in their studies. However, because of the demands of the high school curriculum, the Commission recommends that fine arts programs should be mandatory for all children up to and including grade 9 then become optional for high school. The Commission also encourages schools to make the most effective use of visiting artists and performers to supplement fine arts programs in the classroom.

Career and Technology Studies (CTS) -
The program should be reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of students and provides them with focused experiences in a number of career fields.

One of the important functions of junior and senior high school is to give students an opportunity to learn about and explore different careers, technologies and skills. While the current program is flexible and provides a wide range of experiences for students, the Commission heard that it lacks focus and may not provide students with the kind of experiences they need to understand the world of work and the skills they need for various career paths. Several stakeholders' submissions suggested that this program and how it is delivered should be reviewed.

As part of the review:

Representatives of business and industry, professions, and communities should be actively involved and participate in the review.

A variety of links should be developed with employers and non-profit organizations to provide opportunities for mentorships and work experience.

Community leaders, business and tradespeople, and a range of professionals should be able to play an active role in providing components of career and technology studies. Principals should be able to put flexible staffing arrangements in place in order to harness the resources of people and businesses in the community.

Where schools and school jurisdictions are unable to hire certificated teachers with the necessary skills and experience in a variety of career fields, superintendents should be able to apply to the Minister for permission to allow non-certificated personnel to teach in these fields.

Community leadership and volunteer modules should be strengthened.

Alternative ways of delivering the courses should be explored including partnerships with post-secondary institutions, partnerships with industry, and alternative infrastructure such as portable labs and distance learning.

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[31] See, for example, Deasy (2002); Fiske (1999); Ho et al. (2003); Upitis & Smithrim (2003).

Schools can play an essential role in improving the health of young people and preparing future generations of healthy Albertans.

7. Introduce a new wellness program for all students from kindergarten to grade 12.

There is growing evidence that many of today's most prevalent illnesses can be prevented if people stay physically active and make healthy lifestyle and nutrition choices. Studies suggest that there has been an alarming increase in the number of children who are overweight or obese. Obesity, being overweight and lack of activity are important causes of diabetes and heart disease. According to Statistics Canada, over one third of Canadian children aged 2 - 11 were overweight in 1998-99 and about half of this group would be considered obese. As one report describes it, "Canada's obesity epidemic is galloping out of control and the health consequences will be staggering."[32]

Research suggests that there is a clear link between physical inactivity and obesity of Canadian children.[33] Unfortunately, too much emphasis in past physical education programs was on a more narrow definition of "sports" rather than encouraging children to be physically active in a wide variety of ways. Some children are less interested in sports and participation definitely drops off as students move into junior and senior high school. The revised curriculum for physical education addresses this concern by expanding the definition of physical education to focus more on active lifestyles and a wide range of physical activities that young people can maintain into their adult lives.

In addition to concerns about traditional physical education programs, health programs tend to be a lower priority in many schools, particularly for students in junior and senior high school. The Commission also heard serious concerns from students about the current Career and Life Management (CALM) program. Students said the course was vitally important but, too often, the course material wasn't relevant to the issues they faced and it was taught by teachers who were neither interested in nor well prepared to teach the program.

The Commission believes that schools can play an essential role in improving the health of young people and in preparing future generations of healthy Albertans. A new wellness program should:

- Be mandatory for all students from kindergarten to grade 12.
- Include links with parenting centres and junior kindergarten programs to ensure that all young children get a healthy start in their lives.
- Combine aspects of the current health, physical education and CALM programs into a revitalized wellness program.
- Include some form of daily activity to encourage students to adopt active lifestyles.
- Include topics at the junior and high school level that are relevant to issues students face including drugs and alcohol, nutrition, physical activity, parenting, life and career planning, post-secondary choices, personal finance, and preparing for lifelong learning.
- Be taught by teachers who are well trained and committed to the importance of physical activity, health and healthy lifestyles.
- Actively involve community members, organizations and related professionals in addressing specific issues.

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[32] Capital Health (2003, p. 9). [33] Tremblay & Willms (2003).

8. Provide all students with the opportunity to learn a second language.

Looking to the future, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected. Business and trade takes place across international borders and many Alberta businesses are active in markets around the world. As a country and a province, we welcome people from a vast array of countries around the globe - people with different languages, cultures and traditions.

The Commission believes that learning second languages has a number of important benefits.

- It improves students' comprehension and thinking skills.
- It broadens young people's views of the world.
- It helps our province build an advantage in the world marketplace.
- It reflects the fact that Alberta is an increasingly diverse province and it builds greater respect and appreciation for our cultural diversity.
- It gives young people an advantage as they pursue opportunities in post-secondary education and in their careers.

For those reasons, the Commission believes that all children should have an opportunity to learn a second language. School jurisdictions should have discretion in deciding which languages to provide based on the needs and expectations of parents and students in their communities. Given the fact that Canada is a bilingual country, the Commission strongly encourages schools and school boards to continue to make French a top priority.

While the Commission supports second languages, there are a number of important challenges to address.

- Responses to the Commission's workbook suggest that the majority of participants in the survey did not support mandatory second language education. This means more work is needed to explain and convince parents and community members of the importance and value of learning second languages.
- Clarification is needed on the level of proficiency that should be expected for students. Research suggests that five to seven years may be needed for a student to become fully proficient in a second language.[34] Direction also is needed on whether second language education should be available at all grade levels, in the early grades, or at any point before a student graduates.
- There currently is a shortage of teachers with training in second languages and limited capacity in post-secondary institutions to respond to this need in the short term.
- The necessary curriculum and resources may not necessarily be in place.
- Policies are not in place to guide school jurisdictions in making decisions on which languages should be provided in their schools. While many would place a priority on French, a strong case can also be made for expanding programs in Aboriginal languages and in languages that may be important to Alberta's future trade.
- There are opportunities to deliver second language education using electronic delivery and distance learning. However, this would require teachers to be well trained in how to use new technologies and appropriate course materials would need to be available in a variety of media formats.

The province has already indicated its intention to move ahead with mandatory second language education. The Commission urges the government to continue consultations with education stakeholders and parents and to develop a comprehensive policy and plan prior to implementing this new requirement.

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[34] Cummins (n.d.) and De Avila (1997).

9. Ensure that when new curriculum is implemented:

- **Adequate support is available for comprehensive inservice activities for teachers**
- **Support is available for new learning resource materials**
- **Arrangements are in place so that it is clear to teachers and students whether or not new high school courses will be accepted for post-secondary admission purposes**
- **Mechanisms are in place to quickly and effectively address any problems that may occur.**

The Commission consistently heard about the importance of having appropriate resources and support in place whenever new curriculum is introduced. That should include the necessary learning resources as well as inservice activities for teachers to ensure they are well prepared to deliver the new course. To avoid any confusion for students and teachers at the high school level, arrangements for acceptance of courses for post-secondary entrance should be in place before new courses are introduced.

10. Improve students' transitions from grade to grade and school to school by ensuring better communication, coordinated plans and appropriate support for students.

We often take it for granted that students will simply carry on from grade to grade with little difficulty. In fact, the risks of children failing or getting left behind are highest at every transition point in their school careers.

There are some big steps and major changes in children's experiences as they move from kindergarten to grade 1 or from grade 3 to upper elementary grades, not to mention the fear and trepidation many feel when they take the big leap to junior high or from junior high to senior high. These transitions are not easy ones for many students.

To ease those transitions and improve students' chances of success:

- Every student should have a progressive plan in place for his or her next steps in school with the goal of at least completing high school and being ready for further studies or entry into the workforce. Parents should be actively involved, along with students and teachers, in preparing these plans.
- Better communication should take place between schools involved at key transition points.
- Coordinated transition plans should be in place between all sending and receiving schools and current initiatives to bring students to the new schools and make links with students in higher grades should continue.
- "First year" counselling should be in place for students moving from elementary to junior high and from junior high to high school. Parents should also be actively involved at these critical transition points.
- Support services should be in place, particularly counselling and appropriate planning, to ensure smooth transitions. Schools should be encouraged to share best practices and successful models for easing the transition for students.
- Wherever possible, adjustments should be made to classroom structures so that there aren't abrupt changes in students' experiences.
- School improvement plans should include steps for ensuring successful transitions for students. That should include effective communication about teaching strategies that have proven to be effective for students who face academic challenges.

Prepare the next generation

The previous section of this report outlined a number of trends that will affect the future of our province and our young people. Combining that information with what we know about the numbers of students who finish high school and go on to successfully complete post-secondary education, some very important conclusions can be drawn.

- ***The 21st century requires more diverse skills.***

  With Alberta's vibrant resource-based economy, there's been a perception that young people can succeed and get well-paying jobs without finishing high school or getting some post-secondary education. That may have been true in the past but today, the perception is ill-founded and misleading to young people.

  Looking ahead, completion of high school will increasingly become a necessary condition for success as an adult - for good citizenship, for personal achievement, and for work. With respect to employment, high school completion will be the very minimum requirement for entry to the workforce and projections show that, for the vast majority of jobs, some level of post-secondary education will be required. Information also shows that young people with post-secondary credentials do better in the labour market. They're able to get better jobs and they're higher paid.[35]

- ***Moving from high school to work is a complex and uncertain process.***

  The experiences of most young people do not show a straight line from school to the world of work. The process tends to be unstructured and uncertain as young people move in and out of post-secondary education and from low-skilled and part-time work to more secure careers. In many cases, young people spend a number of years trying out different options before they find a career field they're interested in pursuing on a more permanent basis. While this experience can be productive for some young people, for others it amounts to little more than lost years.

  One report describes the transition process as follows:

  > The process by which young people move through the education system and into adult employment roles is neither simple nor orderly. Most do not make a single transition from school to work. Instead, many Canadian youth work part-time while still attending school and continue to participate in the education system for some time after taking up full-time employment. Some then leave the labour market to return to school, hoping to improve their labour market options. Hence rather than using the term school-to-work transition, it is more appropriate to speak about the process as school-work transitions and to recognize their longer-term, bi-direction, multi-dimensional nature.[36]

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[35] Applied Research Branch (1998a).   [36] Krahn (1996, p. 1).

- ***Significant gains have been made in keeping students in school but looking ahead, we have to do much better.***

Across Canada, information shows that fewer students are dropping out of school before they complete high school and more are getting post-secondary or trade credentials. In Alberta, more than half (56%) of all working-age Albertans (aged 25 - 64) had an education qualification beyond high school, up from 47% in 1991.[37] According to Statistics Canada, Alberta also had the fastest growth rates for the trades.[38]

On the other hand, the results in a number of key areas are simply not good enough.

Far too many Alberta young people fail to complete high school on time. One out of every four students does not complete high school within five years of entering grade 10. The completion rates are slightly below the national average[39] and simply unacceptable for a province like ours.

The bulk of young people (close to 90%) eventually achieve some form of high school completion but that frequently happens later on in their lives when they see the consequences of dropping out and go back to post-secondary institutions to get a second chance to catch up. The result can be several "lost years" of working in lower paying jobs. When young people choose to return to post-secondary institutions to get the equivalent of a high school education, they pay directly through tuition fees and, in effect, Alberta society pays twice - once when the student is in high school and again, paying a significant portion of the costs of upgrading at post-secondary institutions.

- ***Not enough young people go on to post-secondary studies.***

Only about 60% of students who enter high school go on to complete a post-secondary education of some type. The other 40% are left very poorly prepared for work in the 21st century.[40]

Among parents and high school students, there also is a very strong focus on university education and not enough students consider the wide range of choices available, especially in the trades and technologies.

The results for students who enter post-secondary education are also not very encouraging. As much as a third of students who attempt post-secondary education fail to complete their programs.[41] While research in this area is limited, the reasons for dropping out of post-secondary programs are many and varied but academic performance is a relatively minor one. Whatever the reasons, the low completion rates suggest that:

> The kinds of choices many students are making seem to be seriously flawed or misguided
> High school and post-secondary programs are not well enough aligned so that young people are able to make smooth transitions.

In addition to these concerns, Alberta also ranks behind Ontario, British Columbia, the Yukon and Quebec in the number of working age people with university degrees. The Calgary-Edmonton Corridor study noted earlier in our report showed that, as one of the fastest growing economic regions in Canada, the Corridor is the most heavily dependent on other provinces for its university graduates.[42]

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[37] Statistics Canada (2003, p. 23). [38] Ibid. [39] Canadian Education Statistics Council (2000, p. **228**). [40] In 2002, 58% of Albertans aged 25 - 34 reported having completed post-secondary education compared with 62% of Canadians in that age group (Government of Alberta, 2003b). [41] Alberta Learning (2003a, p. 8). Actual post-secondary completion rates are not available. [42] TD Economics (2003).

The issue of keeping kids in school is nothing new. But the consequences of dropping out are more serious than ever before. The reality is that, without some post-secondary education, young people face a future with limited job prospects. And unless more young people choose to go on to post-secondary education and complete their studies, our province will not be able to develop the highly skilled workforce we need for the 21st century. For these reasons, the Commission believes that concerted and deliberate action is needed to address these issues on an urgent basis.

11. Develop and implement a comprehensive, province-wide strategy with the goal of ensuring that 90% of students complete grade 12 within four years of starting high school.

When students drop out of high school it's a failure of the education system, plain and simple. Yes, there are lots of reasons for it. Many of those reasons are complex and go well beyond what happens in school. But it's also true that students don't just suddenly decide to quit school. The process begins typically when they're in junior high school or even sooner. They experience failure and get left behind. They lose interest and no one notices or takes the time to get them back on track. They experience problems in their lives and there's not enough support to get them through and keep them in school. They don't get support at home or don't connect with good role models that stress the importance of staying in school. And once they drop out, coming back is even more difficult.

There are no easy answers or quick solutions. But the current results are simply not good enough and something must be done. Many of the solutions lie in recommendations made in other sections of this report - recommendations focused on:

- starting early and making sure children come to school ready to learn
- making sure there are significant interventions in children's early years in school so they don't get left behind
- providing better and more comprehensive personal and career counselling services for students in junior and senior high school
- reviewing the current CTS program
- expanding work experience opportunities and promoting career exploration through programs such as the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), CTS courses, and collaborative programs such as Careers: The Next Generation, Tech Prep and Career Pathways.

In addition to those recommendations, the Commission believes that concerted and deliberate actions should be taken to keep students in school and improve their chances for success in post-secondary education, in future careers, and in their lives.

The Commission believes that a target of 90% of students completing high school within a reasonable time frame is essential for the future of Alberta's students and our province. Nothing short of a province-wide, concerted and deliberate strategy will be sufficient to meet that target and significantly improve what currently are unacceptable high school completion rates. Every school and school jurisdiction should be expected to participate and report on what actions they are taking to keep students in school and what results they are achieving.

Important aspects of an overall strategy should include:

- Strategies specifically targeted at the different reasons why males and females drop out of school.
- Early identification of students at risk of dropping out. Deliberate efforts should be made to identify at-risk students and address the specific problems involved.
- Adequate personal and career counselling in every school. As noted in the section on "The schools we need", career planning needs to be better designed and resourced. Students and parents should be actively involved and have opportunities to use and integrate accurate and comprehensive information into students' career plans. A variety of employers and representatives of various careers should also be actively involved. Students should have full and accurate information about all post-secondary alternatives, including the trades, college, technical institute, and university programs.
- Flexible arrangements for students to complete grade 12 and make successful transitions to post-secondary programs, trades and apprenticeship programs.
- Opportunities to pilot and evaluate new approaches through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement is a unique and highly successful Alberta program that supports innovation and provides schools with targeted funding to allow them to implement and evaluate new approaches. In 2001-02, the 16 AISI projects that focused on improving high school completion demonstrated moderate effects.[43] Innovative strategies for keeping kids in school should be considered a top priority for funding and results from successful innovations should be shared across the province and used to change traditional practices and keep more kids in school.
- Active involvement of community agencies and organizations outside of schools. The reasons for students dropping out of school are diverse and often involve issues that extend well beyond the education system. Keeping students in school should not be the responsibility of schools alone. Resources beyond the school including community agencies, social services, drug and alcohol abuse programs, and mental health and justice programs should be available to assist and support students at risk of dropping out. Opportunities to use the media to encourage students to stay in school should also be explored.

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[43] Alberta Learning (2003f, p. 27).

12. Undertake a comprehensive, independent review of Alberta's post-secondary education system.

Alberta's post-secondary system includes leading-edge colleges, technical institutes and universities providing a diverse range of programs and learning opportunities. Similar to the basic education system, Alberta's post-secondary institutions are highly regarded and have achieved a solid reputation not only in academic studies but also in research, in career preparation, and in meeting the needs of Alberta's communities, businesses, and professions. Steps also have been taken recently to introduce new legislation for the post-secondary sector.

At the same time, the Commission heard numerous concerns about the post-secondary system ranging from the need to ensure better transitions from high school to the need to review completion rates and the capacity of post-secondary institutions to accommodate the expected increase in the number of students who will need some form of post-secondary education to be successful in Alberta's economy and as global citizens. If effective strategies are put in place, we should be able to reach the goal of having 90% of Alberta's young people complete high school. However, if an increasing percentage of those students go on to post-secondary education, the current system simply does not have the capacity to meet the demand. In fact, in many post-secondary institutions, entrance requirements are already rising because of limited space and resources.

In view of these concerns and the growing importance of post-secondary education to the future of Alberta's economy and our society as a whole, the Commission firmly believes that a comprehensive, independent review of the post-secondary system should be initiated.

While the range of issues addressed in the review should not be limited, at the very least, the proposed review should examine:

- The current capacity of Alberta's post-secondary system to meet the growing demands both from Alberta's students and from the economy.
- Admission policies at colleges, technical institutes and universities and their links to the curriculum expectations for students graduating from high school. The Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer has been working on ways to promote better coordination in high school and post-secondary programs. This welcome initiative should be continued and its success in improving transitions for students should be carefully and independently reviewed over the next five years. This should be expanded to include a thorough review of admission policies at all post-secondary institutions.
- Attrition rates at post-secondary institutions. Far too many young people drop out of post-secondary programs. Given the importance of post-secondary education to individuals and to Alberta's economy, the proposed post-secondary review should identify what the attrition rates are, why students leave, the financial and societal costs, and what steps could be taken to improve the situation and ensure that more young people complete their post-secondary studies.
- Ways of increasing flexibility and improving access to post-secondary education.
- The capacity of post-secondary institutions to use technology to facilitate teaching and learning.

> ***"The lack of appropriate links between the public education system, the post-secondary education system and the world of work creates artificial barriers. Alberta's students deserve better."***
>
> **Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 9)**

The schools we need

A world-class curriculum is essential so that students are well prepared with the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to succeed. But just having excellent curriculum is not good enough.

Combined with that, schools must be places where excellence is the hallmark - where teams of principals, teachers, school staff, parents, and students work together to ensure continuous improvement in students' achievements and results.

In short, we need schools that operate as professional learning communities. The term "professional learning communities" may sound like an academic and sometimes overused term, but it has real meaning and real benefits to students. A number of successful models are in place in Alberta, in other parts of the country, and around the world. Professional learning communities have one primary objective - the continuous improvement of students' results. Teachers and administrators continuously seek and share information and act on what they have learned. And all of their efforts are concentrated on improving their practice so that students can achieve the best possible results.

Combined with the concept of professional learning communities, the schools we need should be places where:

- Teachers have reasonable class sizes and are able to relate to each and every child
- Teachers are able to work effectively with teaching assistants and other professionals to address the unique challenges of children with special needs
- A variety of community supports and services are centred around and available to students in schools
- Schools function as cooperative community centres, sharing expertise, facilities and resources to meet the needs of their students.

There is no single model for developing the schools we need. In fact, as noted earlier, the diversity of schools in the province is seen as a strength by many. The schools we need may come in different sizes and approaches. The key is that they must all be excellent schools where high standards are set and achieved - places where every child learns and every child succeeds.

Goals

Every school operates as a professional learning community and, through partnerships with parents and community members, continually strives to improve outcomes for students.

Provincial guidelines on average class sizes ensure that all students receive the attention and support they need to learn and to succeed.

Every school has access to specialized services from a range of professionals and paraprofessionals.

Schools function not just as centres of education but as active hubs of services for children and community activities.

Adequate resources are available to maintain first-rate schools and ensure that new schools are available when and where they are needed.

Within a strong public education system, the rich diversity of children and the expectations of parents are reflected in a range of high quality choices in the education of children.

Schools make the most effective and efficient use of the resources they have available, both in the school and in the community.

Recommendations

Develop professional learning communities

13. Require every school to operate as a professional learning community dedicated to continuous improvement in students' achievement.

What is a professional learning community and how does it differ from a regular school?

An excellent answer comes from John Waterhouse, Principal of Avondale Elementary School in Grande Prairie. In his words, "The indispensable foundation is to focus on learning, not teaching."[44] In his school, three questions have guided most of their activities in developing a professional learning community:

1. What do we expect students to learn?
2. How will we know if students have learned it?
3. What will we do if students have not learned it?

He goes on to say that, "Although these questions seem so simple and every school could claim to have the answers, critically focusing on these questions with the goal of improving student learning taxes the best professional minds."[45]

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[44] Waterhouse (2003, pp. 19 - 20). [45] Ibid, p. 20.

In professional learning communities, teachers and school administrators continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn. The goal is high achievement and continuous improvement for all students no matter what their individual circumstances. The objective is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals and improve their students' learning. Key ingredients for a successful learning community include:

- Supportive leadership from principals who share authority, empower, and facilitate the work of their staff.
- A shared vision that is focused on student learning and reflects the staff's commitment to students' learning.
- Collaboration among teachers in planning instruction, observing each other's classrooms, sharing feedback, and applying what they have learned to new solutions to address students' needs.
- Capacity to analyze data and use it to guide decisions.
- A supportive environment including adequate resources and policies that foster collaboration, effective communication and staff development.
- Shared accountability for the achievement of students.
- Above all, time - structured time to allow teachers to work together, assess their students' learning, adjust practices, and continuously improve their students' results.

Research on professional learning communities suggests that there are clear benefits.

- For staff, the benefits include reduced isolation of teachers and an increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school, shared responsibility for the development and success of students, powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice, better understanding of the content teachers teach and the roles they play in helping students meet expectations, significant advances in adapting teaching to the students, as well as more satisfaction, higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism.
- For students, the benefits are decreased drop-outs and fewer classes skipped, lower rates of absenteeism, enhanced learning and critical thinking, greater academic gains in math, science, history, and reading, and smaller achievement gaps among students from different backgrounds.[46]

Here in Alberta, several schools have taken steps to become professional learning communities, often with support of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. The Commission's view is that this is a positive model with clear benefits both to teachers and to students. With capable leadership and dedicated action by principals and teachers, this model comes the closest to the Commission's view of what an excellent school involves. It also is linked to other recommendations on the need for excellent preparation and professional development for teachers, strong and capable leadership from principals, and continuous improvement plans for every teacher and every school in the province.

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[46] Hord (1997, pp. 29 - 30).

Implement class size guidelines

Establish and implement province-wide guidelines for average class sizes across school jurisdictions.

- **Rather than set legislated limits or hard and fast rules, there should be flexibility in the size of classes.**
- **School jurisdictions should be expected to meet the guidelines for average class sizes across their school jurisdiction. That means the guidelines would not necessarily be met in each and every classroom but should be met on average across the school jurisdiction.**
- **The suggested provincial guidelines should be:**
  - **Junior kindergarten to grade 3 - 17 students**
  - **Grades 4 to 6 - 23 students**
  - **Grades 7 to 9 - 25 students**
  - **Grades 10 to 12 - 27 students.**
- **Class composition should be considered by schools in setting class size. Generally, classes with special needs students, students whose first language is not English, and vulnerable and at-risk students should be smaller than the suggested guideline. Classes should also be smaller in cases where there are safety considerations such as vocational classes.**
- **School jurisdictions and the province should be required to report annually on average class sizes and should be accountable for explaining whether or not the guidelines have been met.**
- **The province should provide adequate funding to enable school jurisdictions to meet the class size guidelines. Information on average class sizes should be included in school jurisdiction profiles and used to determine provincial funding levels.**

Perhaps no other issue received more attention during the Commission's public consultations than the issue of class size. The Commission repeatedly heard that if there is one change that should be made it is to ensure that all children have an opportunity to learn in classes that are not so large that teachers are unable to give their students - students with special needs and all the students in the class - the individual attention they need and deserve. That view was reinforced in a recent Ipsos-Reid survey where 90% of the respondents agreed that "class size makes a big difference in the quality of education delivered at public schools."[47]

Clearly, parents, teachers and others believe that class size makes a difference. Responses to the Commission's workbook showed strong support for reductions in class sizes. Well over 80% of the respondents said that the province should set a maximum for the number of children in a classroom, especially at the lower grades.

Their views are backed up by a wealth of research reviewed by the Commission.[48] In fact, the impact of class size on educational outcomes is among the most researched topics in education.[49] Reducing class size in the early grades (K - 3) has been found to have academic benefits, especially for poor and minority children. Finn summarized research and documented the advantages of small classes, especially in the elementary grades and for students who attend small classes for two, three or four consecutive years.[50] By 2002, 32 states in the US had implemented a class-size reduction program and/or introduced legislated limits on class sizes.[51]

> *"Parents, teachers and common wisdom favour smaller classes."*
>
> Milton (2003)

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[47] Ipsos-Reid (2003). [48] See Biddle & Berlinger (2002); Ehrenberg et al. (2001); and Finn (2002) for recent reviews of class size literature.
[49] Finn (2002). [50] Ibid. [51] Education Week (2003).

One of the most important projects on the impact of reduced class size was Project STAR (Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio) in Tennessee. Project STAR was a four-year, large-scale randomized experiment in which kindergarten students were randomly assigned to small classes (13 - 17 students), larger classes (22 - 26 students) or larger classes with a full-time aide. Key results with respect to academic achievement and classroom behaviour include the following:

- Statistically significant differences were found among the three class types on all achievement measures and in all subject areas in every year of the experiment (K - 3). On average, students in small classes had superior academic performance to students in larger classes.
- No significant differences were found between classes with teacher aides and regular classes in any year of the study.
- The small-class advantage was found for both boys and girls.
- The benefits were substantially greater for minority students or students attending inner-city schools in each year of the study.
- Students who had been in small classes exhibited superior engagement behaviours in grade 4 including more effort spent on learning activities, more initiative, and less disruptive or inattentive-withdrawn behaviour.[52]

In addition to improvements in achievement and behaviour, Finn also noted the following results from Project STAR:

- Teacher morale increased and teachers spent more time in active teaching and less on classroom management. There were fewer disruptions and fewer discipline problems.
- Students' engagement in learning activities increased and the number of students who had to repeat a grade was reduced.
- The problems teachers encounter in teaching and managing classes were not reduced when a teaching assistant was present.[53]

The Lasting Benefits Study, a five-year follow-up study on project STAR, demonstrated that the positive effects in the early grades result in math, reading, and science achievement gains that persist at least through grade 8.[54]

Another important study is the SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education) program in Wisconsin, a five-year quasi-experimental study designed to help improve the achievement of students living in poverty by reducing class size in grades K - 3. This study found that students in smaller classes in grades 1 and 2 consistently outperformed students in comparison schools. No differences were found in different types of SAGE classrooms (e.g. 15 students with one teacher, 15 students and one teacher in a shared space, 30 students with two teachers team teaching, or 30 students with one teacher plus an additional teacher for reading, language arts and mathematics).[55]

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[52] Finn & Achilles (1999).

[53] Finn (2002).

[54] Nye et al. (1999).

[55] Molnar et al. (1999; 2001).

An external evaluation of the SAGE program found that the achievement advantage persists as students move into higher grades.

> When scores are adjusted for differences in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, attendance and prior knowledge, the SAGE advantage from the beginning of first grade to the end of third grade is shown on all subtests.
> From the end of first grade to the end of third grade, a SAGE advantage is shown on all subtests.
> From the end of second grade to the end of third grade, a SAGE advantage is shown in the third grade reading subtest.
> Adding students lowers the average performance of the class. Each student added to a class beyond 15 students to one teacher results in a decrease of approximately one scale score point in the class average in all academic scores.
> There were no significant differences in achievement gains between classes with 15 students with one teacher and classes with 30 students and two teachers.
> The major classroom advantage of reduced class size was increased individualization.[56]

In Alberta, nine AISI projects undertaken in 2000-01 and 11 in 2001-02 focused on the impact of reduced class size. Increases in student learning for these projects have been small, but there were moderate effects on surveys about the positive impact of smaller class size.[57]

While the evidence clearly points to the benefits of smaller class sizes for younger children in the early grades, it's not clear why small classes work as well as they do. According to Finn, "The strongest hypothesis about why small classes work concerns students' classroom behavior. Evidence is mounting that students in small classes are more engaged in learning activities and exhibit less disruptive behavior."[58] Other reasons include the fact that teachers are able to spend more time on instruction and less on classroom management. There is more time for interaction between students and teachers, more opportunities for small-group instruction, and better assessment techniques.

The critical point in all of the research reviewed by the Commission is that class size matters - but students' achievements will not be improved by reducing class size alone. To achieve the full benefits of smaller class sizes it is essential for students to be engaged in their studies and taught by well-prepared teachers. That means teachers have to practice effective teaching techniques and engage their students effectively in order to maximize the benefits of having fewer students in their classrooms.

The importance of other factors in addition to simply reducing class size is reinforced by the experience in California. The California Class Size Reduction (CSR) program introduced a state-wide voluntary program to reduce class size in K - 3 to a maximum of 20 students. About 1.8 million

Class size matters - but students' achievements will not be improved by reducing class size alone. To achieve the full benefits of smaller class sizes it is essential for students to be engaged in their studies and taught by well-prepared teachers.

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[56] Molnar et al. (2001, pp. 141 - 142).

[57] Alberta Learning (2003f, p. 27).

[58] Finn (2002, p. 23).

students were involved in this program. In the California experience, the relationship between class size reductions and student achievement was inconclusive.[59] Analysis of the California program suggests that improvements could be made by:

- Integrating and aligning it with other reforms
- Providing more local flexibility by allowing a school-wide average of 20 students in K - grade 3
- Providing incentives to a small number of districts to experiment with and evaluate other cost-neutral alternative class size reduction strategies
- Further exploring why and how class size reduction works and identifying best practices
- Ensuring that there are sufficient facilities and qualified teachers.[60]

In terms of the ideal class size for the early grades, no one knows what the optimal size is but some researchers suggest that beyond 17 students in K- grade 3, there is less likelihood that the benefits will be as positive.

Beyond grade three, the research is not nearly as abundant or as clear. In fact, the research conducted by the Commission turned up very few studies that address the impact of class size in the later grades. However, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study (2000) of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy of 15 year olds in 32 countries found that as the student-teaching staff ratio rises above 25, there is a continuous decline in school performance in all three areas of reading, math and science. The PISA study predicted that a student score which is ten points higher in one school than another is associated with an average of 3.3 fewer students per teacher.[61]

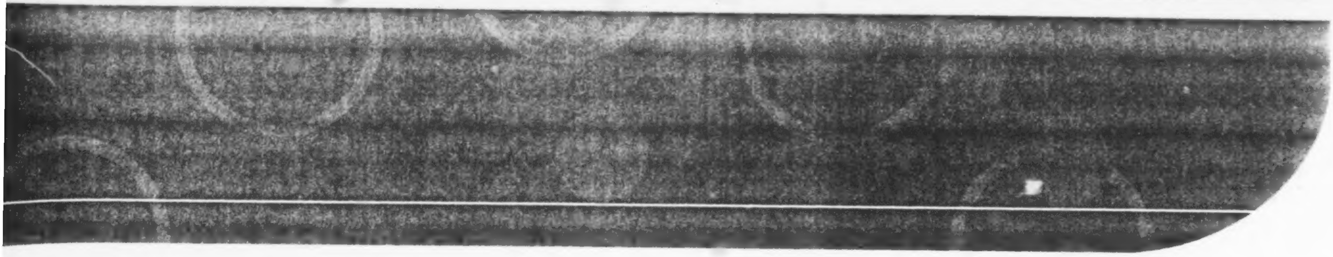
While there certainly is stronger evidence to support the impact of class size in the earlier grades, it seems to make good sense that class size would continue to make a difference to students in later grades, although the impact may not be as significant as it is in the early grades. The PISA study clearly supports this conclusion.

Three provinces have implemented legislated guidelines on class size at all grade levels.

- In Quebec, both maximum and average class sizes are set by the province. They range from an average of 18 and a maximum of 20 in kindergarten to an average of 30 and a maximum of 32 students in secondary schools.
- In New Brunswick, the maximum class size for kindergarten to grade 2 is 25, the maximum for grade 3 is 30, for grades 4 - 6 the maximum is 32, and for grades 7 - 12, it is 33 students. Combined classes have smaller maximum numbers.
- In Ontario, the average size of elementary classes in K- grade 3 must not exceed 24 on average across a school board. Average size for grades K- grade 8 must not exceed 24.5 and average sizes for grades 9 - 12 must not exceed 21.

In Alberta, there currently are no guidelines on class size. The most recent survey from Alberta Learning (2002) showed that the average class sizes were 19.5 for kindergarten, 23.2 for grades 1 - 6, and 25.5 for grades 7 - 9.[62] These averages are down slightly from the previous year but are expected to be higher for the 2003-04 school year. Average class sizes were slightly higher in urban school jurisdictions than in rural ones. From a school buildings perspective, schools in Alberta are designed to accommodate 25 students in a classroom.

[59] See Bohrnstedt & Stecher (2002) and EdSource Inc. (2002).
[60] EdSource Inc. (2002, pp. 5 - 6).
[61] OECD (2001a, pp. 202 - 205).
[62] Alberta Learning (2003b).



The Commission feels strongly that province-wide class size guidelines are critical for the early grades. While there is not the same body of evidence, the Commission believes that students in later grades should also have the benefit of smaller classes where they could receive more attention from their teachers and the classroom environment would be more positive. At the high school level, the range of class sizes may be more varied. Some classes, especially in the trades, will be small out of necessity, while in other classes, the number of students could be significantly higher.

The Commission does not recommend that hard and fast legislated rules be put in place. Setting maximum class sizes in legislation has the potential to cause all kinds of administrative difficulties when the maximum number is reached and there's no where else for a student to go.

Setting provincial class size guidelines provides reassurances to parents and teachers. In addition to research evidence supporting smaller class sizes at the lower grades, perhaps one of the most compelling arguments for implementing province-wide guidelines on class sizes is to build confidence among parents that their children have an excellent opportunity to learn and succeed in classrooms where their individual needs and learning styles can be addressed. It sets a standard for all school jurisdictions. And by requiring school jurisdictions and the provincial government to report annually on class sizes, there will be direct accountability for ensuring that the province-wide guidelines are met.

The Commission also suggests that, while class size guidelines are being implemented across the province, research should be undertaken to assess the impact on student achievement and specifically to address at what level smaller class sizes have the greatest impact, which students benefit most and under what conditions, what is the cost, and what factors need to be in place to ensure that the maximum benefits are achieved. This research should be done over an extended period of time so that the impact can be assessed and guidelines can be adjusted as necessary based on research evidence.

15. Abandon the use of pupil-teacher ratios and replace it with measures of class size and the range of professional and paraprofessional support available for classrooms.

There is considerable confusion around the use of the term "pupil-teacher ratios." While many might think that this is a ratio of students to a classroom teacher, in fact, the measure includes a wide range of professional staff that might provide services and support to the class including counsellors, teaching assistants, and central office staff. The definition of which professional staff should be included in the ratios varies and the result is considerable controversy over what the ratio means and how it should be interpreted.

"In practice, imposing strict limits on class size could force schools to adopt classroom configurations that do not effectively meet the needs of students, teachers and communities."

Alberta Teachers' Association (2002, p. 10)

As an alternative, the Commission recommends that two separate measures be used on a consistent basis to monitor the education system:

- Class size - Every school and school jurisdiction should report their actual class sizes, specifically the number of students in a class with a single teacher. Class size is a more direct measure of the teaching resources brought to bear on a child's development.[63]
- Support for schools - A measure should be developed to track and report on the range of support available for students including specialist services, certificated central office support, counselling, teaching assistants, etc.

Guarantee adequate time for students

16. Maintain current guarantees for hours of instruction available to students and ensure flexibility in scheduling to allow professional learning communities to work effectively.

Currently, elementary and junior high school students in the province are guaranteed 950 hours of instruction every year. Some flexibility can be provided for grade 1 students to ensure there's a smooth transition from kindergarten. In high school, students must have access to 1,000 hours of instruction per year.

The Commission feels that it is important to maintain guarantees on the time available to educate students. This ensures that students will be able to meet the expectations of the curriculum and it avoids the possibility of time being taken away for other purposes.

The Commission also considered the issue of instructional hours for teachers. Across the province, there are variations in how much time a teacher is required to be in the classroom. With the Education Services Settlement Act, clauses related to hours of instruction were effectively removed from collective agreements. The maximum hours teachers can be expected to be in the classroom has increased in a number of school jurisdictions in the 2003-04 school year.

Getting an accurate picture of the hours teachers work is difficult and complex. In addition to their direct, in-class teaching assignments, teachers spend time preparing lessons, marking tests and assignments, working with individual students, communicating with parents, participating in professional development, supervising students, and organizing extracurricular activities. Studies from the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Canadian Teachers' Federation suggest that teachers work an average of about 52 hours a week.[64]

Because of the number of variables involved, the Commission was unable to recommend a reasonable guideline for how many hours teachers should be expected to spend in the classroom. This really should be up to school jurisdictions, superintendents, and teachers to decide. School boards and schools should have flexibility in how they arrange their schedules and their school years to provide the necessary amount of instruction.

As schools move to becoming professional learning communities, sufficient time should be available on a regular basis to enable teachers to share experiences, assess the outcomes of students in the school, and plan deliberate, concerted efforts to improve student performance. Experience in some schools and school jurisdictions suggests that adjustments can be made within existing schedules to allocate time for professional learning communities and ongoing professional development.

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[63] Ehrenberg et al. (2001, p. 2).

[64] See ATA (1997) and CTF (2003a).

17. Encourage schools and school jurisdictions to explore alternatives to the current school year.

The majority of Alberta's schools operate on a September to June school year. This is a long-standing tradition in Alberta and most of Canada and it dates back to an earlier time when our economy was primarily based on agriculture. The Commission believes there is considerable merit in exploring alternative ways of arranging the school year. In Australia, for example, the school year is broken into four terms with a five to six week holiday in the hottest months. The experience there suggests that this arrangement of the school year helps students, especially at-risk students, retain more of their learning over shorter school breaks and also reduces teacher burn-out.

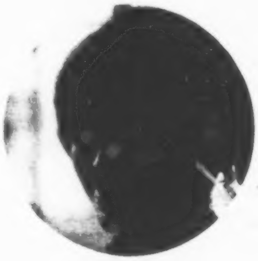
In Alberta, a number of schools are experimenting with alternative ways of arranging the school year. In 2002-03, more than 60 Alberta schools were operating on a year-round basis. These options should be explored further, particularly to assess their impact on teaching strategies and students' achievement. Adjusting the school year would also allow school jurisdictions to make better use of existing facilities, particularly in rapidly growing communities where there is limited school space available.

Expand students' access to counselling and other specialized services

18. Ensure that all students have access to adequate counselling, diagnostic, and other support services necessary for them to succeed.

Through its consultations, the Commission consistently heard about the shortage of adequate support services in school, especially from counsellors, teacher librarians, teaching assistants, and maintenance support. All of these people should work together as a team to help classroom teachers and ensure that students succeed.

In terms of counselling, the Commission feels strongly that all students should have access to both career and personal counselling. The Commission consistently heard that there were not enough counsellors in schools and the majority of their time was taken up with personal counselling, leaving not enough time for adequate career and educational counselling. Currently, there are no provincial guidelines in place for determining the appropriate number of counsellors for different sizes of schools although some school jurisdictions have developed guidelines for their own use.



"We worry because our youth have been told there is only one way to win – namely, to prepare for the professional ranks by going into a 4-year baccalaureate program ... Unfortunately, the 'only way to win' paradigm is a myth."

CAREERS: The Next Generation (2002, p. 11)

In addition to personal counselling and crisis management, counsellors play a vital role in career counselling. They should provide students and their parents with accurate and current information about careers and the full range of post-secondary options and support them in integrating good information with good decisions about career choices. The Commission frequently heard that, because of their backgrounds and their own educational experience, many counsellors and teachers are focused on universities as the first choice for students. This view is too frequently echoed by parents who are often unaware of the range of opportunities available in other post-secondary institutions and in apprenticeship and trades training programs. Counsellors should be well versed in all the various options, they should have access to adequate resources and information supplemented with online resources, and they should be able to provide sound advice to their students. In addition to well-trained counsellors, people in the community, especially people involved in business, industry, professions, labour, community and social agencies, should be actively involved in career planning with young people.

In the area of career counselling, the Commission believes that an important role could be played by trained paraprofessionals who have up-to-date career and post-secondary information and are able to support the work of counsellors in providing information to students and parents.

The Commission also heard that the number of teacher librarians in schools has declined dramatically. A recent Canadian study indicated that, from 1978 to 2000, Alberta's roster of teacher librarians dropped from 550 to 106. The study concludes that "If you step back and look at the evidence, if you were concerned about achievement and literacy, then you would be investing in your school libraries and teaching librarians.[65]

Today's teacher librarians provide a gateway to a wealth of information available from a vast array of Internet resources. They collaborate with teachers to assist them in selecting and using a wide variety of sources of information and learning resources. Given the vast amount and diversity of information available on the Internet, teacher librarians teach children how to search for information, find what they need, use information appropriately, and make good judgments about the information they access. These skills will be vitally important to students in their future careers.

Counselling and direct assistance to students in developing research and information retrieval skills are just two examples. Students also need access to services from diagnostic specialists, speech and language therapists, and a wide range of professional and paraprofessional support.

Schools and school jurisdictions should explore alternative ways of ensuring that these services are available in their schools. That could involve services being provided on a part-time basis by traveling counsellors and other professionals or through the use of technology to connect students and teachers to specialized services in other communities. This is one important area where technology can open up a wealth of opportunities to access specialized services. This is already being done in health care and it provides a promising model for the education system.

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[65] Haycock (2003).

Establish a new "education link"

19. Establish a province-wide "education link" telecommunications service to provide teachers, parents and students with immediate access to specialized services and advice.

Imagine this ... a teacher gets a new student from Somalia and has no understanding of the child's language, culture and background. The teacher is overwhelmed and so is the student. Where does the teacher turn for immediate help and advice? A teacher is working with a particularly challenging child with special needs. The techniques she is using aren't achieving the results she expected. Where does she turn for advice? Or think about parents, struggling to help their child with homework that just doesn't seem to make sense.

In each of these cases, access to an immediate source of trusted advice and support would be invaluable and help allay a great deal of frustration experienced by teachers, parents and students. It could help streamline services in central offices and improve access to these important, specialized services.

In health care, a province-wide Health Link system has been established to provide people with immediate help and advice. With the expansion of SuperNet across the province, a similar model could be established for the education system, staffed by capable teachers (perhaps newly retired teachers), specialists, and other professionals who could provide advice and assistance on an almost immediate basis or refer people to other sources of information and advice.

Develop schools as hubs of services for children and communities

20. Ensure that schools become the centre of a wide range of coordinated, community services targeted at meeting the needs of children and youth.

Many of the services children need extend well beyond the capabilities and expertise of schools. In their presentation to the Commission, the Alberta School Boards Association highlighted concerns with what they called "mandate creep" - increasing expectations that schools will be able to address every problem for every student.

The reality is that schools can't do it all. While there have been many efforts to provide better coordination of services for children outside of school (the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative is a good example), there is much to be said for the school becoming the centre for a wide range of services for children and youth. Those services would not have to be provided or managed by schools and school boards, but schools could function as the single point of contact for a range of essential services for children including personal counselling and diagnostic assessments, health services and children's mental health supports, social work and children's services, justice programs and programs for children at risk. In some cases, the services could be housed within schools while, in other cases, schools could provide a source of information and access to services that are available in the community.

"Schools are no longer just houses of learning. Those days are long past."

Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 15)

> *"In the inner city or in the country, schools are the glue that binds communities together. They are a meeting place and a learning place for the entire community."*
>
> Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 15)

Support for this type of coordinated approach would have to come from a number of government departments and community agencies so that it does not become an added burden on schools. Some changes may be needed to the Municipal Government Act to allow non-education activities to be provided on land designated for school purposes and to support this integrated model of service delivery for children.

21. Encourage shared use of facilities, programs and services among school jurisdictions and with the community.

Facilities are expensive - expensive to build and expensive to maintain. All school boards and a number of community agencies are struggling to find the necessary resources to build new facilities and to modernize and maintain existing ones.

The Commission heard about the sensitivity involved in mandating public and separate school jurisdictions or school jurisdictions and communities to share facilities. We particularly heard from Catholic school boards that are concerned about preserving their Catholic vision and mission.

However, there are some successful models in place already. For example:

- Trillium Centre in Sherwood Park - includes Elk Island Public Schools, Elk Island Catholic Schools and Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services. This facility will share a site and common building services with school jurisdictions on either side and children's services in the middle. There are coordinated and shareable CTS facilities but separate gyms and playgrounds.
- Fox Run School/Mother Theresa School in Sylvan Lake - includes Chinook's Edge School Division and Red Deer Catholic Regional District. The two school jurisdictions share a site and common building systems in addition to common labs and studios and a common commercial kitchen. Separate gyms can be combined when needed.
- Grande Prairie Community Knowledge Campus in Grande Prairie - Includes Grande Prairie Public School District, Grande Prairie Roman Catholic Separate School District, the City of Grande Prairie and numerous sports and community groups. The Catholic board operates a high school on the site and the public board anticipates having a high school on the site by 2007. The francophone board is also interested in having a presence on the site. In partnership with local sports and community groups, the site will house a twin ice arena and soccer facilities.
- Mother Teresa School in Edmonton - Includes Edmonton Catholic Schools, the City Centre Church Association, ABC HeadStart, Big Brothers and Big Sisters Society, Project Adult Literacy Society, School Lunch Program, and the Caritas Health Group. The school board provided additional space at the school to accommodate breakfast and lunch programs, early intervention, in-school mentoring, medical and dental health, adult literacy and other inner city initiatives.
- Rocky Tri-Campus in Rocky Mountain House - includes Wild Rose School Division, Red Deer Catholic Regional Division, and Red Deer College. This project will include extensive shared space including library, textbook storage, multimedia room for videoconferencing, CTS and weight room. Students from the two schools will use the facilities at different times. Red Deer College will deliver CTS instruction for Red Deer Catholic students and some other high school courses will also be offered by the College, easing the transition to post-secondary education.

In the City of Edmonton, work has been done by the City along with Edmonton's public and separate school boards, Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Infrastructure, and a number of other organizations on a Future School Sites Study. The study developed a vision which reflects the Commission's view of the future direction many schools could take across the province. Their vision is as follows:

> "School sites in communities of the future will be centrally located, multi-use 'community knowledge campuses' that serve students and learners of all ages and house a range of complementary recreational, community and public services. They will be 'beacons' at the heart of the community that are relevant, adaptive, flexible and accessible."[66]

This vision and the various cooperative approaches described above are excellent models of partnerships among public and separate school boards, community agencies, municipal governments, and post-secondary institutions. The Commission encourages school boards and communities to look carefully at cooperative models that have worked in other jurisdictions and consider the possibilities for sharing facilities such as sports and arts facilities or facilities for career and technology studies in order to make the best use of limited resources in the community and at the provincial level.

The Commission also encourages school boards and municipalities to work together on joint planning and joint use agreements for school facilities.

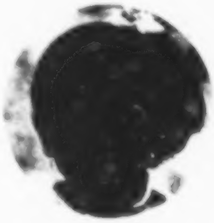
Maintain and build schools

22. Ensure that sufficient and predictable funding is available to renovate existing schools and build new schools when and where they are needed.

The recent Budget 2003 Centennial Plan included $450 million in capital projects for schools over the next three years, including $226 million for school expansions and new schools and $224 million for school preservation projects. That is in addition to the $1 billion provided over the past three years as part of the New Century School Plan.[67]

In spite of that significant investment, Alberta continues to have a substantial backlog of maintenance projects, estimated to be in the range of $1.2 billion. In addition, there continue to be problems with shortages of school space in rapidly growing communities and excess space in others. In fact, estimates are that the amount of excess school space in the province is equivalent to 140 - 150 mid-sized schools. This problem will only become more severe as enrolments are expected to decline over the next several years. Maintaining this excess space adds significantly to the cost to the education system.

Considerable work has been done over the past few years to address these issues and put overall school capital plans in place. The Commission supports this work and believes that the provincial government should continue its efforts to ensure that sufficient and predictable funding is in place



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[66] Edmonton Planning and Development Department (2003, p. 3).
[67] Government of Alberta (2003a, p. 24).

to address both renovations of existing schools and building new schools when and where they are needed. School jurisdictions are also encouraged to address the serious issue of excess space and take steps to maintain smaller, under-utilized schools only when no other viable options are possible. While research shows positive results from smaller schools, maintaining very small schools is costly and can compromise not only the range of programs available to students but also the ability to build schools in growing communities where they are urgently needed.

23. Consolidate funding for building and renovating schools, as well as the operation and maintenance of schools, within the Alberta Learning budget.

Currently, funding for the "education" component of schools is provided through Alberta Learning's budget. Funding for building and renovating schools as well as their ongoing operation and maintenance is provided by Alberta Infrastructure. This is a fairly recent change, designed to ensure that maintenance and infrastructure issues were given a higher priority within a Ministry with considerable expertise in this area. While many school board representatives, superintendents, and school business officials supported the current arrangement of departmental responsibilities, they point to recent problems with the adequacy of funding provided for operations and maintenance and the imbalance with funding provided for the educational aspects of school boards' responsibilities.

During its public consultations, the Commission heard extensive concerns from custodial staff in particular about the inadequacy of current funding to cover the costs of maintaining schools. Maintaining a school, paying the utility bills, and keeping up with regular maintenance are all part of the successful operation of schools. Designing and building new schools and making decisions on when existing schools should be renovated are also important education decisions. When parents are concerned about whether new schools are available in growing communities or whether funding is available to upgrade older schools and maintain existing schools in good running order, they expect the Minister of Learning to be responsible.

While the expertise of staff in Alberta Infrastructure should continue to be used to guide decisions, the Commission believes that funding should be consolidated in Alberta Learning. This allows all aspects of funding for the education system to be addressed by a single Ministry. It provides a full and complete picture of the costs of operating Alberta's education system in a single budget and holds a single Ministry responsible and accountable for the adequacy of funding for all aspects of Alberta's schools. Furthermore, it allows more accurate comparisons of funding levels with other provinces.

Issues related to the adequacy of current operations and maintenance funding are addressed in a subsequent section of our report.

Ensure safe schools and positive choices

24. Ensure that all schools encourage positive attitudes, good behaviour and respect for others, provide a safe environment for students, and address incidences of disruptive behaviour when they occur.

Every child should be able to go to school without worrying about whether he or she will be the victim of bullying, harassment or violence. For the most part, Alberta's schools are safe and secure places for students. But there have been serious concerns with bullying and increasing incidences of unacceptable behaviour in our schools and across the country.

Many schools have taken steps to address these problems through initiatives such as Safe and Caring Schools, Lions Quest programs, Roots of Empathy, and effective behavioural supports (EBS) programs. The key is that unacceptable and threatening behaviour cannot be tolerated in Alberta's schools.

Schools should reflect the values outlined earlier in our report. Schools also should consistently foster the development of emotional literacy, provide character education and conflict resolution techniques, and work with parents to reinforce positive behaviour in school, at home and in the community.

5. Continue to provide high quality choices for parents and students while, at the same time, preserving and enhancing public schools.

As noted earlier in our report, a thriving public education system is a cornerstone of Alberta society. While Albertans are strong supporters of the public education system, they also clearly value their ability to make choices among public and separate schools, francophone schools, charter and private schools, distance learning and home schooling. The availability of choice has had many benefits, including encouraging the public system to be more responsive to the expectations of parents. This is reinforced by the fact that provincial grants follow the students to the schools of their choice. At the same time, the Commission shares concerns about the impact too much choice can have on the public system.

In terms of private schools, the Commission heard arguments for and against their current funding arrangements. Alberta's current support for private schools is amongst the most generous in the country and the Commission does not recommend any changes to the current funding arrangements.

26. Maintain current limits on the number of charter schools and the length of their terms and expand efforts to share their outcomes with the rest of the education system.

Alberta is the only province in the country with charter schools. Under existing policy, a maximum of 15 charter schools is allowed across the province. Charter schools must be approved by the Minister of Learning and they are approved on a term-certain basis. Their terms can only be extended once. Currently, 13 charter schools have been approved.

Suggestions have been made by charter schools that their approval and related funding should be extended beyond the current time limits. The Commission also heard that, although the original intent of charter schools was that they would be centres of innovation and share their experiences with the rest of the education system, in fact little sharing of experience and outcomes has taken place.

The Commission suggests that the current limits on the number and length of term for charter schools should be maintained and further efforts should be made to share information and outcomes from these schools with the rest of the education system. This would reflect the original promise of charter schools and promote innovation across the province. At the end of the time limit, charter schools would have to choose to operate as an alternative program under the umbrella of a public school jurisdiction or seek approval to operate as an approved independent school.

Success for every child

The common thread is that each child brings his or her unique gifts, abilities and dreams to the classroom, and every child deserves every chance to succeed.

Alberta's classrooms include a rich diversity of students with a wide range of abilities, interests, backgrounds, languages, cultures and religions. In fact, diversity has become one of the defining features of Alberta's schools and trends suggest that this will continue to be the case in the future.

Today's classrooms, in Alberta and across the country, include children who are gifted or who have special talents, children who have mild and moderate disabilities and those who are severely disabled. They include children who come from a variety of homes, family structures and communities, children who live in poverty and those who come from very wealthy families, children who live in major urban centres and those who live in remote rural communities. They include First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, children who are new to Canada and Alberta, and children whose first language is not English or French.

The diversity is enormous. The common thread is that each child brings his or her unique gifts, abilities and dreams to the classroom, and every child deserves every chance to succeed.

Ensuring that every child succeeds is a difficult and complex challenge. While the reasons are unclear, the reality is that the number of children identified as having special needs and behavioural problems is increasing at a dramatic rate. It is a well known and disturbing fact that, while there has been some good progress in recent years, the results achieved by First Nations and Métis children, particularly in terms of completing high school and going on to post-secondary education, are far too low. In its public consultations, the Commission repeatedly heard about the increasing challenge teachers face in trying to respond to the wide diversity of children in their classrooms.

Alberta's schools have a longstanding practice of welcoming all children. A wide range of approaches, alternatives and special programs have been put in place to address students' special needs and improve their chances of success. While this diversity is a clear strength of Alberta's education system, it also puts added pressure on the system and all involved, including students, parents, teachers, principals and school boards. A combination of programs, strategies and resources must be in place to make sure the classroom situation works and works well for every child. That includes teachers who are well prepared to address the diverse needs of students with a variety of techniques and teaching strategies. It involves an evolving and up-to-date curriculum that recognizes the diversity of Alberta's students. It requires special programs and strategies for children who are at risk of getting left behind. It requires systematic and ongoing assessment to ensure that special programs are achieving the results we want and expect. And it requires adequate resources - not just financial resources but also adapted learning resources, devices to help children with special needs, and people with a wide range of skills and expertise.

Goals

All children have the opportunity and support they need to succeed in schools that recognize and celebrate diversity.

Aboriginal students achieve the same levels of success at school as non-Aboriginal students in an environment where their cultures and values are respected and reinforced.

Flexible programs and placements are designed to meet students' needs and give them the best chance for success. For students with special needs, the options range from full integration to specialized programs, depending on the individual needs of individual students.

Direct actions are taken to identify vulnerable children and improve their chances of success at school.

Teachers are well prepared, both through their preservice training and through ongoing professional development, to address the diverse needs of all of their students including Aboriginal students, students with special needs, students who are gifted and talented, students with other languages, cultures and backgrounds, and students who are at risk.

Recommendations

Improve education outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth

"Aboriginal education gets a failing grade."

While some good efforts have been made, that stark admission reflects the current situation for far too many Aboriginal children. It comes directly from the Alberta School Boards Association's presentation to the Commission and is echoed by virtually every other organization that addressed Aboriginal education in their submissions to the Commission. Education stakeholders struggled with specific solutions, but they are clear and unanimous in their desire to see things change and change for the better. The Alberta School Boards Association presentation goes on to say that, "Our education system has failed these students. It has failed their communities. It has failed the next generation of children who will be born poor and disadvantaged because their parents haven't completed high school and can't provide for their needs. The public education system must do better by these students. We must stop the cycle."[68]

While the words may sound harsh, the reality is that too many Aboriginal students drop out before they complete high school and too few of them go on to post-secondary education. Results presented to the Commission showed that there are some communities where 100% of First Nations children failed to meet the acceptable standards on provincial achievement tests. In many cases, Aboriginal children simply don't show up to write the tests. As noted earlier in our report, over half of Aboriginal people over the age of 15 have not finished high school. Clearly, something must be done.

[68] ASBA (2002, p. 14).

The Commission firmly believes that this is one of the most pressing issues facing Alberta's education system. If we are unable to take action soon, the impact will be felt by generations of First Nations and Métis children for decades to come, and by Alberta's society as a whole.

There are some positive signs and good efforts have been made. A number of programs and schools the Commission visited show promising signs of better results to come. Many Aboriginal parents and community members see education as the key to their children's future. Aboriginal children begin school eager to learn, but their achievements trail off by the time they reach grade 9 and many of them leave school soon after that. In fact, the process of leaving school likely begins when children are in their early grades. School jurisdictions and schools acknowledge that the results are not what they should be and have implemented a range of programs and initiatives to improve the results. But frankly, they are searching for solutions as well. Alberta Learning has made concerted efforts in the area of Aboriginal education and has worked directly with Aboriginal leaders, teachers and community members to develop a First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework.

All of these efforts are important and reflect a common desire by Aboriginal people, by those involved in the education system, and by Albertans to urgently address the problem and improve the results.

At the same time, there are a number of challenges in Aboriginal education.

- ***Aboriginal people are diverse and there is no single solution for all.***

  Alberta has a rapidly increasing population of Aboriginal people. That includes First Nations people living on reserves and whose children attend schools on reserves or off reserves in schools operated by provincial school boards. It includes First Nations people who live off reserve, many of them in our major urban centres, and whose children attend regular schools. In many cases, those children are in regular classrooms with all other children. First Nations children and youth in urban centres face special challenges because they don't have a connection to the land and their parents and communities struggle to provide the support they need. In some cases, school boards have established special programs for these children such as the Rainbow Spirit Project in six Edmonton Catholic schools while, in other cases, schools like the Amiskwaciy Academy have been established specifically for Aboriginal children. The Piitoayis Family School in Calgary serves a diversity of Aboriginal children and provides Blackfoot and Cree language classes in addition to traditional Aboriginal singing, dancing, and cultural ceremonies. In Wabumun, Mother Earth's Children's Charter School has recently been established, based on Aboriginal culture and providing daily instruction in Stoney and Cree languages.

Alberta also has a growing number of Métis people who live on Métis Settlements or in communities across the province. In fact, the Métis people in Alberta are unique in that they not only have a unique culture but some also have a specific land base. Some schools on Métis Settlements are operated and managed through the Northland School Division while others are operated by other school boards.

While the numbers are uncertain, Alberta also has some Inuit people who have moved to our province and primarily live in the cities. Their children are most likely to attend public and separate schools in the major urban centres.

This mix of people reflects the diversity of Canada's Aboriginal people. As the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People noted, "The diversity of Aboriginal perspectives and outlooks is a reality that other Canadians must accept, for the sake of greater understanding across the cultural divide. Aboriginal people themselves are struggling to come to terms with it, as they strive to build bridges across their differences so that they can use their combined voices to their collective benefit." The Royal Commission goes on to say that, because of this diversity, "... no one answer will do for all Aboriginal people. No one model - be it self government, a healing centre or housing design - will speak to all Aboriginal nations. Just as there are many voices, there must be many responses."[69]

- ***Responsibilities are complex.***

  Responsibilities for the education of Aboriginal children are complex and interwoven. For First Nations children living on reserves, First Nations bands have primary responsibility along with support from the federal government. But where children attend public schools or provincial education programs are provided on reserves, both the province and school jurisdictions are also involved. For Métis children, there are different responsibilities depending on whether they live on Métis Settlements or in other communities. Unfortunately, the result of this mix of responsibilities is unclear accountability for results and an ongoing "circle of blame" where no one is clearly accountable for improving the results for children. For longer term solutions, finding a way of getting past jurisdictional issues and sorting out responsibilities is essential.

- ***Education is just one part of the problem.***

  While First Nations and Métis value education, the success of their children depends on a number of related factors including housing, social conditions and poverty. Economic, social, attitudinal, community and parental issues go beyond the mandate of the Commission and the education system but continue to have a direct impact on the achievement of Aboriginal children in school.

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[69] Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996).

- ***Aboriginal people must have more control of the education of their children.***

  The best approach for the future is to give First Nations and Métis people more direct control of the education of their children. Dramatic improvements in Aboriginal education and the outcomes for children are unlikely to happen unless Aboriginal people have control and all components work together to address the need for change. The Commission heard that Aboriginal people are tired of being "done to." In spite of the best intentions of people in the education system, Aboriginal people - especially parents, elders, and community leaders - need to be empowered to take "ownership" of and responsibility for the education of their children.

In approaching these challenges, the Commission did not see it as our role to rewrite the work that has already been done or to undertake yet another in-depth study of the issues involved. As noted earlier in our report, more study is not the answer; it's time for action.

Instead, the Commission focused on seeking the views of First Nations and Métis leaders and representatives and asking for their advice on the most important steps that should be taken to implement many of the good ideas that have been discussed in the past. It also should be noted that the Commission's mandate does not include band-operated schools on reserves; however, a number of suggestions were made by First Nations representatives and are reflected in the Commission's recommendations.

The Commission strongly feels that the best hope for the future of First Nations and Métis lies in their children and youth. They need outstanding role models, good parenting, positive reinforcement, and every chance to develop strong skills and reach their full potential. That includes seeing their parents and elders as strong advocates for education, able to control, influence and direct their schools.

Two other key points are important as a preamble to our recommendations. The first is that innovation linked to clear accountability is key. There isn't a single solution or approach that will meet the diverse needs of Aboriginal people and communities. Instead, a number of innovative approaches should be implemented and assessments should be made about what works and what doesn't. The second key point is that the province has a leadership role to play. The province is in a unique position to facilitate actions by a number of parties involved in the education of Aboriginal children, to evaluate the results and to ensure a consistent direction and continuous focus on improving results.

Within that context, the following recommendations outline a package of actions targeted at a single goal - to ensure that Aboriginal children succeed at school and are well prepared for post-secondary education and their future careers. Achieving that goal will require a combination of resources, capacity and expertise within First Nations and Métis communities, and the federal and provincial governments.

"Métis learner success requires a strong partnership and trust relationship between the Métis Nation of Alberta and Alberta Learning. From this relationship, post secondary governance boards, school boards, Métis parents and communities will work together for the highest level of Métis learner success."

Métis Nation of Alberta (2003, p. 2).

27. Implement and provide adequate resources for the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework.

The Commission consistently heard that the Policy Framework reflects the views of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people as well as the various organizations that were extensively involved in the policy development process. The overall direction is sound and many of the specific recommendations outlined by the Commission are referred to or consistent with the Policy Framework. To date, implementation has been slower than expected and adequate resources have not been available. The Commission therefore urges the province to move ahead with implementing the Policy Framework on a priority basis. That will require not only deliberate plans and concerted actions but also sufficient resources and should be viewed as a long-term investment in the future of Aboriginal people.

In order to assess the impact of initiatives taken under this framework and the benefits they have for Aboriginal children and youth, there would be considerable merit in being able to identify Aboriginal students and track their progress. Provided that privacy concerns can be properly addressed, having an identifier for Aboriginal students would allow schools, school jurisdictions, Aboriginal communities, and the province to evaluate various initiatives and track improvements in students' achievement. Such a step should only be taken with the support of Aboriginal leaders, parents and communities.

28. Ensure that, when a First Nations student who resides on a reserve attends a provincial school, he or she is funded at the same level as any other student.

To implement this recommendation:

- Provincial tuition rates should be established by agreement among First Nations governments, the provincial government, and the federal government.
- Tuition agreements should reflect all costs involved in educating the child in the school jurisdiction he or she attends including base grants, special education, etc.
- First Nations bands could choose to provide additional support to their local school jurisdiction for "add-ons" such as cultural and language programs developed specifically for their children.

29. Ensure that, where significant numbers of First Nations parents send their children to provincial schools off reserve, they have a role in the governance of those schools and the school jurisdictions responsible for the schools their children attend.

The numbers of First Nations children going off reserve to attend provincial schools is significant and growing. The Commission believes that First Nations parents should play an active role in the governance of schools their children attend and the school boards responsible for those schools. This is particularly important for schools that have a significant proportion of First Nations students. There is no single model that will work best for every community. First Nations, the provincial and federal governments, and school jurisdictions should establish and implement a range of innovative governance options that best fit the circumstances of local communities.

More study is not the answer. It's time for action.

30. Initiate discussions with treaty region governments and the federal government to address the governance of education for First Nations students.

The Commission is encouraged by recent discussions about the development of regional school boards to govern First Nations schooling based on Treaty regions, especially in terms of supervising tuition agreements, the development of curriculum, and policy. The Commission understands that there is no "one size fits all" model and that Treaty Regions should adapt the approach to fit local needs and circumstances. The Commission understands that some good work is underway; it should be supported and expanded. Given the extensive experience of the provincial government in education, the province should be prepared to lend its expertise and support these initiatives as appropriate.

31. Establish appropriate incentives to encourage more First Nations and Métis to become teachers.

Currently, there are very few First Nations and Métis who are qualified teachers, able to teach in Alberta schools as well as teaching Aboriginal languages and cultures. The Commission believes that one of the best ways of improving outcomes for Aboriginal children is to increase the number of First Nations and Métis teachers. Financial and other types of incentives should be considered in order to significantly increase the number of Aboriginal teachers not only in schools for Aboriginal children but in all schools across the province. The standards and quality of teacher preparation programs for Aboriginal students should be just as high as all other teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs should be expanded to communities outside of the major urban centres. This would allow Aboriginal students to participate in these programs without having to move as far away from their homes and communities.

In addition, the Commission recommends that all students in teacher preparation programs should gain a broad understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity. Teachers who teach in areas with significant First Nations and Métis students should include ongoing professional development on the most effective ways of working with these children as part of their professional development plans. Online teacher support should be available to assist teachers working with First Nations and Métis students.

32. Ensure that at-risk Aboriginal children are identified early and get the support they need before they begin school.

Like all children, First Nations and Métis children who are at risk should be able to come to school ready to learn. Wherever possible, there should be a strong commitment for First Nations and Métis students to have opportunities to attend both junior and regular kindergarten taught by a qualified teacher and full-day programs should be available for children who are at risk.

33. Take steps to ensure that First Nations and Métis youth are well prepared for post-secondary education and the workforce.

It's important for Aboriginal youth to understand the clear link between their education and opportunities for them to get good jobs and begin productive careers. Counselling and comprehensive information should be available to Aboriginal students to ensure that they are well informed about the range of career and work opportunities. This should start with students in junior high school or even in earlier grades. Because of their wealth of experience, elders should play a significant role in this process. Students should also have access to positive role models and mentors who can guide them in their post-secondary and career choices. In Saskatchewan, with

the establishment of the First Nations University of Canada in Regina, the route for Aboriginal youth is much more visible and clear while in Alberta, the array of choices is complex. Aboriginal youth need comprehensive guidance to help them in making choices that lead to post-secondary education and productive careers.

34. Ensure smooth transitions for students moving from reserve and Métis Settlement schools to other public schools.

In many cases, First Nations and Métis children move from schools in their own communities to public schools, especially when they reach the higher grades. Careful and deliberate plans must be in place to ensure a smooth transition. The Commission heard stories about Aboriginal children automatically being labelled as having special needs without a formal assessment of their skills and abilities. Since this is a crucial time when many students are at risk of dropping out, actions should be taken to build bridges between the schools and ensure a smooth and positive transition for students.

35. Establish parenting centres to make a positive link with parents and reinforce the strong parenting skills required to help their children come to school ready to learn.

As noted earlier in this report, every child should come to school ready to learn, and that begins with parents actively involved and engaged in giving their children encouragement, stimulation and the best start in life. For that reason, the Commission recommends that a network of parenting centres be established across the province. Parenting centres are an important way of providing a link with Aboriginal parents, giving them a place to come for support and advice and to share ideas and experiences. Parenting centres could be located in schools or in communities. They could be linked to other agencies or centres of community activity.

The key is that, where there are significant numbers of Aboriginal parents involved, or in communities that are made up primarily of Aboriginal parents, Aboriginal people should view the parenting centres as their own. They should reflect traditional values and positive parenting approaches. They also should provide an opportunity for schools to gain wisdom and greater understanding of Aboriginal parents and children.

36. Require all schools with a significant population of First Nations and Métis students to have well trained home-school liaison workers to assist in integrating the school into the community and developing sound communication between Aboriginal homes and schools.

Experience has shown that positive connections between schools and parents are key to the success of children. Home-school liaison workers can play an essential role in this area. In the past, this approach has been tried but, unfortunately, the liaison workers were too often seen simply as assistants rather than as a key link in achieving success for children and youth.

Home-school liaison workers should serve as the "connectors" between homes and schools and be able to:

- Facilitate and encourage communication
- Work with teachers, administration and staff
- Manage community relations
- Build strong partnerships
- Find appropriate ways for engaging Aboriginal parents and community members
- Diffuse potentially volatile situations
- Build trust.

In order to fulfill these responsibilities, home-school liaison workers should receive appropriate training at the college level. The provincial government, in partnership with the federal government and First Nations and Métis organizations, should take the primary lead in developing and implementing training programs for home-school liaison workers.

> *"Rather than taking curriculum and infusing it with culture, we need to take culture as a starting point and infuse it with education."*
>
> Stan and Peggy Wilson, University of Alberta

37. Explore and implement new governance models for schools in Métis Settlements.

Currently, six of the Métis Settlements are included in the Northland School Division. These Settlements are responsible for their own education systems including policy, budgets, hiring, organizing schools, and teaching students. For the other two Métis Settlements, the schools are operated and governed by other provincial school boards. The Commission heard concerns that parents and community members in these Métis Settlements would like to have more direct involvement in the governance of their schools.

Several governance models should be considered for all of the Settlements. The options include:

- Including all the Settlements under the purview of Northland School Division
- Establishing a separate board for Métis education with each of the settlements represented on the Board (model similar to Child and Family Services Authorities)
- Maintaining the current arrangements but establishing expanded responsibilities with provincial school jurisdictions responsible for education on two of the settlements - Kikino and Buffalo Lake.

38. Develop and implement expanded Aboriginal language and cultural programs.

It is important for Aboriginal children and youth to have opportunities to learn and retain their languages and to have their traditional cultures reflected in their curriculum and learning environment. Wherever possible, Aboriginal languages should be taught by people who are not only fluent in the languages, but also are qualified teachers. When Aboriginal people who are not qualified teachers are involved in teaching languages, they should work closely with qualified teachers in the classroom to improve the chances of success and to integrate languages with other aspects of the curriculum.

It's also important for all students to learn more about First Nations and Métis people and to understand the richness of their languages and cultures in order to build greater understanding and respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and youth.

39. Ensure that First Nations and Métis are directly involved in the development of curriculum and learning resources for and about Aboriginal people in all subject areas.

This is consistent with the direction of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework and provides an important way for Aboriginal people to be directly involved in the development of curriculum and learning resources. It also ensures that the content provides an accurate portrayal of First Nations and Métis history and cultures.

40. Continue to provide choices for Aboriginal parents for the education of their children.

The Commission was impressed with the leadership and variety of models in place. These different models should be allowed to flourish, their outcomes should be assessed, and the results should be used to guide decisions. Parents should be able to choose a variety of approaches, some of which provide more separate settings for Aboriginal children and others which are integrated with other public schools. Where parents choose an integrated setting for their children, they may need to assume more responsibility for ensuring their children maintain their language and understanding of their cultures. In some cases, Aboriginal language programs have been developed and are accessible to parents. Provincial standards should be maintained regardless of the particular model of education provided.

41. Establish a provincial centre of excellence in Aboriginal education.

The Commission understands that several post-secondary institutions have a focus on Aboriginal and northern studies and, as noted earlier, there are several innovative approaches currently underway in Alberta schools. The Commission feels that a centre of excellence designed specifically to address issues in Aboriginal education could leverage knowledge and experience from existing programs and initiatives and provide an invaluable focus for research, innovation, and sharing of best practices. It could be established in partnership with the federal government. It could become a resource for Aboriginal educators, for researchers and for schools seeking advice and support in the best ways of meeting the needs of their Aboriginal students. It could explore and provide linkages to research and initiatives related to a wide range of social issues that affect Aboriginal students' success at school including adequate housing, good nutrition, and strong community supports. And it could provide an opportunity to learn from elders about traditional ways of teaching Aboriginal children and youth.

Address every child's special needs

For a variety of reasons, the number of children identified as having special needs is increasing. That includes children with a wide range of needs including those who have severe disabilities, mild and moderate disabilities, and children who are gifted and talented. Between 1995-96 and 2000-01, the number of students with severe disabilities increased by 64% while the overall student population increased by 5%. The number of students reported as having mild and moderate disabilities increased by 140%. Estimates are that about 10% of students have mild and moderate special needs, about 2% have severe needs, and about 2% are gifted or talented.

The most recent class size survey from Alberta Learning indicated that 78% of classes had children with special needs. On average, out of a class of just over 24 students, three had mild or moderate needs and one had severe special needs.[70]

Not surprisingly, as the number of students with special needs has increased, so have the costs. Special education funding more than doubled between 1995-96 and 2002-03, increasing from $158 million to about $336 million. In the most recent provincial budget (2003-04), funding for children with severe disabilities increased by 8%. In 2000, a comprehensive review of special education was undertaken and the Commission understands that implementation of the recommendations from that review is well underway.

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[70] Alberta Learning (2003b).

"There is no one ideal classroom type, no 'one size fits all.' Full time integration into the regular classroom sounds wonderful on paper but does not work for all students. Some students will require substantially segregated settings to receive concentrated remediation at their level, others are desperate to discover people who are like them."

Dr. Debra Andrews (2002)

In spite of the increases in funding provided, the Commission consistently heard that schools and teachers are struggling to ensure that the needs of these children are met. School boards expressed concerns that not only is funding inadequate to cover the full costs of educating children with special needs but also the services required for these children often extend well beyond the mandate and responsibilities of schools. Teachers expressed concerns that they don't have access to adequate professional and paraprofessional support and resources. In the words of the ATA, "Too often, teachers who have insufficient background or training in the rapidly evolving discipline of special education are required to develop and implement highly specialized instruction and modified programs."[71] Parents and teachers indicated that the impact on other children in the class needs to be addressed. When children with special needs are integrated into regular classrooms without adequate support and preparation, there can be negative impacts on all students in the class, including the children with special needs.

In spite of these concerns, those involved in the education system consistently expressed strong support for including children with special needs in the school system. In their view, the degree of integration, the specific program and setting should depend on the needs of the child and the bottom line is that adequate support must be in place.

Many parents of children with special needs see full integration of their children in regular classes as the preferred option. While some have suggested that children have a right to full integration, legal opinions, including a Supreme Court of Canada case, indicate that integration in a regular classroom setting is not always the best option for a child with special needs. The best interests of each child should be the deciding factor in determining his or her placement.

Underlying the Commission's vision is a clear commitment that Alberta's schools should welcome all students and all students should have the opportunity to learn and to succeed. The specific placement and program provided should depend, first and foremost, on what is best for the child and what provides the best chance for the child to learn and succeed. When children are integrated into regular classrooms, it is essential that adequate support be in place for the children with special needs, for their teachers, and for the sake of the other children in the class.

82. Ensure that adequate support is in place when children with special needs are integrated into regular classrooms including:

- **Access to professional support for assessment**
- **Access to appropriate learning resources and assistive devices (e.g. Braille)**
- **Paraprofessional support**
- **Coordinated services with health centres, Child and Family Services Authorities, community organizations, and parenting centres**
- **Adequate time for teachers to organize and plan programs and support services with teaching assistants, other professionals, and community agencies**
- **Smaller class sizes.**

The best interests of each child should be the deciding factor in determining his or her placement in school. Years of experience in Alberta schools have shown there are benefits from integrating children with special needs, both for the children with special needs and for other students in the class, particularly in fostering respect and tolerance for others. But successful placement of students with special needs depends very much on having adequate support in place, not just financial support, but access to resources and professional services in the community, time to adequately plan and implement special programs, positive relationships

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[71] ATA (2002, p. 12)

with parents, and careful attention to the needs of all children in the class. Better coordination is also needed in the vast array of services provided at the community and provincial level through a wide range of community agencies and authorities and provincial government departments.

43. Ensure that teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development activities prepare teachers to address the diversity of students, including children with special needs.

Recommendations later in this report call for a review of Alberta's teacher preparation programs. One of the key areas to be addressed in the review includes an assessment of how well beginning teachers are prepared for addressing the diverse needs of children in their classrooms. In addition, addressing the needs of special education students should be a continuing focus of professional development activities in every school.

44. Provide classroom teachers with adequate support to develop and implement individual program plans for children with special needs.

Currently, an Individual Program Plan is required for every child with special needs. These plans are developed by teachers in collaboration with specialists, consultants, and parents. Teachers, in particular, expressed concerns about the lack of support and time available to develop and implement these plans. The Commission believes that training should be available both in preservice and in professional development programs. Principals should ensure that teachers with special needs children in their classrooms have sufficient time to adequately plan, monitor, work with other professionals and paraprofessionals, implement effective individual program plans, and assess the progress of special needs students.

45. Expand early assessment and intervention to ensure that children with special needs are identified early and get the support and programs they need before they come to school.

The importance of early identification and intervention is well known. As noted earlier in our report, the Commission believes that children's chances of success at school are greatly enhanced if they come to school ready to learn. Implementation of parenting centres along with junior kindergarten and full-day kindergarten for children at risk should ensure that children's needs are identified early and support is available before they come to school.

46. Provide appropriate training and professional development for teaching assistants who work with children with special needs.

When children with special needs are integrated into regular classrooms, a teaching assistant is often assigned to work directly with a child. While post-secondary programs are available to train teaching assistants, a significant number of teaching assistants in Alberta are not trained and do not have a diploma. They are assigned to work with a teacher who also may not have specialized training in working with children with special needs or in working with teaching assistants. In effect, most teachers and teaching assistants learn on the job with little or no help.

A trained teaching assistant working with a teacher who understands how to adapt programs and work with teaching assistants clearly would be a positive step. Training should also be available for teaching assistants (and teachers) in how to address the needs of children with specific conditions.

The specific placement and program provided should depend, first and foremost, on what is best for the child and what provides the best chance for the child to learn and succeed.

> *"In the absence of adequate support, the objectives and promise of integration are being compromised."*
>
> **Alberta Teachers' Association (2002, p. 12)**

The challenge comes in making training available to teaching assistants. The Commission believes that one of the best approaches would involve making use of SuperNet to deliver e-learning programs to people who currently are working as teaching assistants. A series of courses provided in this way would ensure that all teaching assistants in the province have the skills needed to work with children and teachers and to meet the challenges of a robust special education program. Specific courses should also be developed on effective techniques for working with children with different conditions so that when a teaching assistant is assigned to a child with a certain condition, he or she is able to easily access a short course on the best ways of addressing that child's unique needs. In addition, ongoing professional development activities planned at the school level should provide opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to work together in planning programs and assessing the results.

47. Ensure continuity in funding for children with special needs from junior kindergarten through to grade 12.

Continuity in funding, programs and support is critical as children with special needs move through the education system. Under current funding arrangements, children as young as 2 ½ are eligible for funding for special programs to meet their needs. Individual funding (Program Unit Funding) is provided to children with severe and mild and moderate disabilities before they enter grade 1. Once they become school-aged, the funding model changes. If children have severe special needs, they continue to be eligible for individual funding but children with mild and moderate needs are funded through a block funding approach. The Commission heard concerns that this can cause a disconnect in programs and funding. The Commission also heard that programs and support for children with special needs can change as they move from elementary school to junior and senior high school.

The Commission believes that, as children proceed through school, there should be consistent funding arrangements in place to make sure their needs are met. Alberta Learning, Children's Services, and school jurisdictions should review the current funding and program arrangements to ensure that this objective is met.

48. Expand opportunities and support for students with special needs to continue on to post-secondary education or into the workforce.

While significant steps have been taken to include children with special needs in schools and adapt programs to ensure their success, much less progress has been made at the post-secondary level. Information on the number of students with special needs attending post-secondary institutions is not available but the numbers would be far lower than in the basic education system. Experience from pilot projects supported by the Learning Opportunities Task Force in Ontario suggests that three essential components must be in place to support students with learning disabilities at post-secondary institutions: appropriate diagnostic assessments, access to support by qualified and knowledgeable learning strategists working with individual students, and access to adaptive technologies. Effective linkages should also be in place between high schools and post-secondary institutions to ensure that up-to-date information about a special needs student's diagnosis, skills, and successful teaching strategies are passed on from schools to those involved in planning programs and supports for the student at the post-secondary institution.

While there undoubtedly would be substantial requirements for additional resources and support, the Commission believes that more can be done by post-secondary institutions and by government to open up opportunities for students with special needs to participate and learn important skills and prepare them for future careers. In addition, more can be done to ensure that students with special needs are able to join the workforce and become independent and contributing members of our society.

49. Develop a province-wide strategy using SuperNet as a vehicle for expanding programs and developing challenging opportunities for gifted and talented students.

Children can be gifted in many different ways. Gifted children typically have exceptional potential and abilities across a wide range of areas such as general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitudes, creative thinking, social skills, musical ability, artistic and kinesthetic talents.[72] Too often, it is assumed that students who are gifted or who have special talents will succeed in school simply because they are bright and can get by without special help. In fact, there are gifted students who struggle in regular classrooms and others who do not reach their full potential unless they are placed in programs specifically designed to address their learning styles and challenge their abilities.

Across the province, schools and school jurisdictions have adapted programs for gifted and talented children and have introduced challenging programs such as the International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programs. However, the Commission believes that more could be done to meet the needs of these special students. SuperNet provides a unique opportunity to use technology to develop challenging programs and opportunities for gifted and talented students. This is especially important in smaller communities where specific programs currently are not in place.

Provide support for children with diverse languages and cultures

50. Provide students with English as a second language, students who are not proficient in English, and francophone students who need upgrading in French, and their teachers, with access to appropriate assessment, programs, learning resources, professional and paraprofessional assistance required to meet their needs.

Alberta's society is becoming increasingly diverse as we welcome more people who are new to Canada. In addition, a number of children in the province are raised in families where the first language spoken is not English. As a result, these children may come to school with little knowledge and ability in English. In both cases - children new to Canada who don't speak English and children who were born here but are not proficient in English - special programs and support are needed. In 1998-99, the province changed its funding policies to extend funding for Canadian-born students who are not proficient in English.

Recent information from Alberta Learning's class size survey indicated that 31% of classes across the province had students who were learning English as a second language.[73]

While the increasing diversity of children in the classroom provides rich experiences for students and teachers, it also brings a number of challenges. Children whose parents are refugees, who have faced significant traumas, or who come from war-torn countries, have early experiences that may leave deep-seated scars and make it difficult for them to adjust to school. Teacher preparation programs should take deliberate steps to make sure beginning teachers have the necessary skills to address the needs of children who speak languages other than English and come from many different cultures and traditions. Support

"Gifted children, whose abilities exceed the teaching level of the class, are also at risk of having their needs go unmet .... Many become bored and disillusioned with school, and some will exhibit behaviour problems, which is a sad loss considering such children have the ability to be the leaders, teachers, professionals and entrepreneurs of tomorrow."

Dr. Debra Andrews (2002)

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[72] Alberta Learning (2000, p. 17). [73] Alberta Learning (2003b).

should be available in the classroom to ensure that these children are able to learn English as quickly as possible while, at the same time, meeting the expectations of the curriculum. This is another case where there should also be clear links to other services in the community so that parents and families are successfully integrated into Alberta society.

"The role of the school goes well beyond promoting simple tolerance. At their best, public schools foster a profound understanding and respect between individuals and groups that is the basis for democratic citizenship."

Alberta Teachers' Association (2002, p. 48)

Children whose parents have minority language rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms have the right to send their children to francophone schools. The province currently has five francophone school boards that provide these programs. Estimates are that about 40% of students who attend francophone schools need assistance to become proficient in French when they begin school.[74] Since French is the language of instruction in francophone schools, additional support is needed to improve the proficiency of these children. Support for French language upgrading programs[75] currently is provided on the same basis as English as a second language programs. The Commission supports this direction.

51. Extend funding for English as a second language, English language deficiency and French language upgrading programs to children in junior and regular kindergarten.

Under the current arrangements, kindergarten is not included under the School Act as part of the regular school system and funding for English as a second language, English language deficiency and French language upgrading is not provided for kindergarten children. In view of the importance of taking action early to improve children's chances of success at school, it is critical that funding and support be available for children when they are in junior and regular kindergarten.

52. Create provincial proficiency standards for assessing English as a second language students, students who are not proficient in English, and French language upgrading students, and provide funding until students reach the standards.

Currently, students whose first language is not English (or French in the case of francophone students) are expected to achieve sufficient fluency within three years. However, some students may need more time. Under current funding arrangements, Alberta Learning will provide funding for students regardless of the number of years they spend in English as a second language, English language deficiency or French language upgrading programs.

The Commission believes that funding should not be based on an arbitrary guideline of three years. Research suggests that, depending on the age and situation of the student, it can take five to seven years to become fully proficient in a second language.[76] The objective should be to ensure that students are proficient in English or French as quickly as possible. Provincial standards for proficiency should be developed and funding should be tied to students' abilities to meet the standard.

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[74] Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta (2002, p. 16).

[75] French language upgrading for francophone students is referred to as "Francisation".

[76] Cummins (n.d) and De Avila (1997).

Making the grade

A good education is critically important to the future of our young people and our province as a whole. We need to be confident that our students and our schools are achieving the results we want. If students in the past were able to make their way in the world without the benefit of a high school diploma combined with at least some post-secondary education, those days are gone forever. Looking ahead, the haves and have-nots in our society will be determined, more than ever, by their success or failure in school and their ability to keep on learning throughout their lifetimes.

To put it starkly, the consequences of students failing at school are more serious than in the past. They risk getting left behind, relegated to low-paying and marginal jobs. And the province risks falling behind in an increasingly competitive global marketplace where ideas, innovation and highly skilled people will be the keys to success.

Because the consequences are so much more serious than in the past, people's attention is turning more and more to accountability - defining the responsibility of all partners in the education system and holding them accountable for setting high expectations and making sure those expectations are met and exceeded by children across the province.

In Alberta, expectations for all students are set through a comprehensive and challenging curriculum. As noted earlier in our report, the province is known for its excellent curriculum and high standards. Recommendations from the Commission are intended to build on that solid foundation and prepare well-rounded, capable and talented young people - young people whose achievements will match the best and the brightest anywhere in the world.

In many respects, expectations for students' achievement are even higher than in the past, and it's up to teachers, principals, school staff, superintendents, parents, community members - and students themselves - to make sure that every child succeeds.

How do we know that students are making the grade, achieving the expectations of the curriculum and leaving school well prepared for the challenges they'll face in post-secondary education, careers and community work?

We do it through rigorous accountability - by putting in place a comprehensive process for measuring the achievement of students and the state of the education system, considering all the factors that affect achievement and outcomes, determining whether or not the education system is meeting its goals, reporting on the findings to all the partners in education and in the community, and working together to channel resources and make improvements where they are needed.

Accountability involves taking what we know and have learned from careful assessments and using that information to constantly improve results. Genuine accountability brings no surprises. It builds on effective sharing of information and collaboration between teachers and administrators, teachers and other teachers, teachers and students, schools and parents, and schools and the community. Fundamentally, it is about moving and improving, not about shaming and blaming.

Accountability begins with a firm understanding that excellence is never an accident; it results from high expectations, deep commitment, intelligent direction, and skillful execution of plans for continuous improvement.

Genuine accountability brings no surprises. Fundamentally, it is about moving and improving, not about shaming and blaming.

The Commission firmly believes that the public has the right to know and to be satisfied that the system is operating effectively, efficiently and equitably and that students are learning what they are expected to learn. Perhaps more important, parents and students have a right to know how well individual students are doing in meeting expectations and what needs to be done to improve results.

Accountability comes in many forms and information about achievement comes from a variety of sources. Accountability for students' achievement should include national, international and province-wide testing programs combined with ongoing classroom assessments by teachers. It should happen not just once a year when final reports are prepared or when students' report cards go out, but on a consistent and continuous basis. It involves a deliberate and thoughtful assessment and debate about what works and what doesn't. Most important, it should be part of a careful plan to help good schools get better and turn around low performing schools.

Goals

- **Parents, students and community members have timely, accurate and consistent information based on a broad range of measures about the performance of students in every school and school jurisdiction in the province.**
- **Schools and school jurisdictions are accountable to parents, students and communities for the results their students achieve. They regularly clarify objectives with teachers, students and parents, collect and organize data, use information to improve their results, take concerted action, and evaluate the impact of their action plans for continuous improvement.**
- **Every school uses ongoing assessment to shape its plans for improving results and to build teachers' capacity to assess and promote high achievement for all students.**
- **Ongoing assessments allow students to demonstrate what they know and can do in a variety of ways, and this is viewed by teachers, parents and students as essential feedback, natural and necessary to learning.**
- **Innovation is a hallmark of the education system. Ongoing research is supported and used to guide policy decisions and continuously improve students' achievement.**

Encourage school improvement, research and innovation

53. Ensure that the primary focus of school and school jurisdiction education plans continues to be on improving students' achievement.

School improvement does not happen by chance - it happens as part of a well-thought out plan for improvement supported by an active team of principals, teachers, school staff, parents and students.

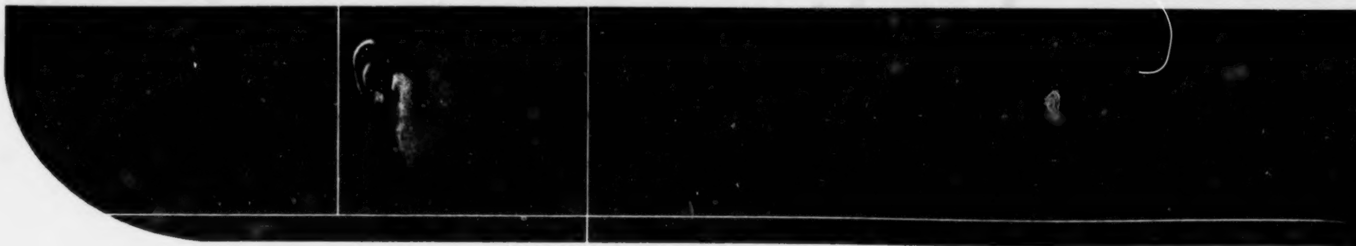
Currently, all school boards and schools are required to prepare and report on three-year education plans outlining their mission, goals, and broad strategies as well as measures and indicators of success. The plans must include certain goals specified by Alberta Learning and the expectation is that the focus of the plans will be on continuous improvement.

In a professional learning community, principals and teachers are engaged in a constant process of setting goals, assessing how well their students are learning, analyzing data from assessments of students' achievement, deciding what's working well and what isn't, and taking action to improve their students' results.

For effective school improvement plans:

- All schools and school jurisdictions should design and implement systematic plans to assess performance levels using a variety of assessment tools, collect reliable data, and analyze and use that information to develop strategies for improving student achievement.
- Principals should play a strong leadership role, working with teachers, students, school staff, parents and others to develop and implement constructive school improvement plans.
- Teachers and parents should work together to review each child's achievement in relation to clearly defined objectives and to encourage continuous improvement.
- Through school councils, teachers and parents should review whole school results from provincial assessments and classroom assessment information to understand where students are in their learning and how improvements could be made.
- Principals should be required to involve and engage school councils in reviewing and providing input into annual school improvement plans.
- Schools facing similar challenges (described as "statistical neighbours") should share successful practices that have resulted in improvements in students' outcomes.
- The primary focus of ongoing assessment of student performance should be on tracking the improvement in students' achievement over time in relation to a school's action plans rather than comparing one school to another.

In addition to effective school improvement plans for each and every school, Alberta Learning should continue to report on student achievement in relation to provincial standards on a province-wide basis, by school and by school jurisdiction. Wherever possible, the Ministry should provide contextual information to help teachers, parents, students, and community members understand and interpret the results. It should also collect information and report publicly on class size compared to guidelines recommended by the Commission, services for children with special needs, and other specific areas identified in consultation with education stakeholders. Alberta Learning should also continue to report publicly on its own performance in relation to the goals and objectives of its business plan.



54. Continue to support research and innovative approaches for improving student outcomes.

The best schools continuously seek innovative ways of improving their students' results. Never ready to accept what they do as "good enough," the best schools constantly evaluate what they are doing, embrace new ideas, and search for the best ways to achieve excellent results for all their students.

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement is a highly successful initiative that supports research and encourages innovation across the province. It has been identified as an exemplar in transforming results into action.[77] The size and scope of this initiative is unique in Canada and the Commission commends the provincial government for its leadership in establishing the program. The focus on local initiatives empowers schools and school jurisdictions to identify challenges, develop innovative approaches, test their ideas, analyze the results, and share information with their communities. With funding from the provincial government, innovative approaches are supported and evaluated, and the outcomes are shared with all other schools in the province.

The Commission recommends that:

- Targeted funds should continue to be available through initiatives such as AISI to support locally identified school jurisdiction improvement projects. Where circumstances warrant, funds should be provided to continue projects that demonstrate initial results but require further assistance to meet their goals.
- Efforts to widely disseminate promising practices should be continued and expanded.
- Proposals for projects should include a plan for disseminating successful strategies and appropriate funding should be included to ensure that sharing of effective approaches takes place.
- The evaluation methods used for AISI projects should be used as a model for evaluating and measuring the outcomes of school improvement initiatives.
- Outcomes of successful AISI projects and other research initiatives should be used to guide policies and change teaching and learning practices.
- Schools and school jurisdictions with successful AISI projects should be encouraged to adopt and implement the innovations on an ongoing basis.
- Long-term research projects should be undertaken to assess the ongoing impact of innovative projects.

The Commission's research program also highlighted the need for ongoing, long-term research on a variety of issues in education including school leadership, various aspects of teaching and learning, the impact of class sizes and other factors in the classroom, as well as the impact of active involvement by parents and community members. Too often, major policy decisions are made without the benefit of research. The Commission believes that research should should be used to guide future policy decisions.

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[77] Taylor & Tubianosa (2001, p. 72).

Maintain and improve provincial achievement tests

55. Maintain and improve provincial achievement tests at grades 3, 6 and 9 by ensuring that:

- **Provincial achievement tests continue to be used primarily as a system-wide check on how well students achieve provincial standards**
- **Results from the tests are used along with ongoing classroom assessments to guide and inform plans for improving students' achievement**
- **The tests are enhanced over time to include a variety of tasks that allow students to demonstrate the full range of their skills, including their ability to apply their knowledge, think critically, and express their thoughts and ideas.**

Currently, all Alberta children are expected to take achievement tests in grades 3, 6 and 9. These tests are intended primarily as a consistent way of assessing how well students across the province are meeting the expectations of the curriculum.

A constructive view of assessment and evaluation is one in which:

- Assessment criteria are clearly stated with a variety of examples of what good work looks like that can be shared with students and parents
- Assessment is used as feedback to enhance student learning
- Students become accurate assessors of the quality of their work.

Standardized tests like the provincial achievement tests can be an important part of a constructive view of assessment. But it's important to strike the right balance between classroom assessments and standardized tests. Both are essential to provide accurate and objective information to assess "how we are doing." Rather than debating whether or not standardized tests should be used, the focus should be on how to make the best use of complementary types of assessment.

Large-scale assessments like the provincial achievement tests provide a picture of student performance and school data on the academic performance of students compared with all other students in the province. Results compiled over several years provide a long-term view of changes in students' performance over time. They can contribute to positive change when they engage teachers, principals, parents and students in thinking about and discussing what takes place in the classroom. Measuring performance against provincial standards provides schools and school systems with information on what needs to be done so all students learn more and learn better. Combined with daily classroom assessment by teachers, they can be used to "raise the bar and close the gap" in student achievement.

While provincial achievement tests are important tools, they are only one piece of the performance picture. The performance of individual students is affected by a wide range of factors both inside and outside the school - factors like students' needs and learning styles, parental involvement, teaching approaches, teacher expertise, school climate and curriculum expectations. Analysis of students' results, communication of those results, and the development of plans for improvement must take into account all of the various factors that can affect how well students perform on tests.

> ***"... many of the arguments for and against testing concern the issues of fairness and usefulness of testing for teachers and students juxtaposed with the public's and the government's need to know how well schools are performing. Reconciling the two sides ... is a matter of building the case that a balanced approach to testing exists. Such an approach must give appropriate attention to the multiple functions of classroom assessment relative to the functions of high-stakes achievement testing."***
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> **Burger and Krueger (2003, p. 1)**

Provincial achievement tests should give all students a chance to demonstrate what they know and what they can do. They should reflect the range of content, skills and expectations outlined in the provincial curriculum including demonstration of competencies in writing tasks and extended responses in all subject areas where students' achievement is tested. Currently, only the language arts achievement tests include a written response component. The tests should continue to be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of children in Alberta's schools. The format of the tests should be expanded to include more performance-based questions so students can demonstrate not only what they know but also how well they can use that knowledge to create new knowledge, to think critically and to solve problems.

Because achievement tests are designed primarily as a check on the education system rather than a test of individual students' abilities, the Commission does not support requiring the results of these tests to be used as part of students' final grades. Teachers may wish to consider students' results as part of their overall assessment and for planning purposes, but the primary emphasis should continue to be on the teachers' ongoing classroom assessments of their students' achievements using a range of assessment tools.

The Commission also heard concerns about the pressure grade 3 tests place on children. Too often, the pressure teachers feel with provincial tests is transferred to their students. Instead, the tests should be seen by teachers and by students as just one part of an ongoing assessment of students' achievement. The key reason for retaining grade 3 tests is that this is a critical stage in children's learning and development. By this point, the goal is for all children to be able to read and to understand and apply basic mathematics concepts. If there is no system-wide check on how well children are doing, the risk is that there will be no opportunity to take concerted action at the provincial, school jurisdiction and school levels if students are not meeting expectations. The tests should continue to be developmentally appropriate for children in grade 3. Steps should also be taken to encourage teachers to prepare their students in a positive way and to put the tests into context along with the other ongoing classroom assessments teachers use.

Provincial achievement tests also are valuable tools for teachers and principals to assess their schools' achievement patterns in light of provincial expectations and results. The tests are most successful when classroom teachers are actively involved in "creating, validating and marking tests and examinations."[78] They should provide opportunities for teachers to design assessment tasks, to develop and use clear descriptions of the performance required at various levels in the curriculum, to score students' work, and to analyze data and use it to make decisions about effective teaching strategies in their classrooms and across the school. Teachers in schools with large numbers of students with special challenges who are not achieving the standards set in the curriculum should receive focused support and assistance in developing strategies to improve their students' results. This support should include guidance on how to analyze the results and discussions with other educators who are overcoming similar challenges. Principals should be expected to lead staff and parent discussions about student achievement and use the results as part of their continuous improvement plans.

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[78] ATA (2002, p. 58).

56. Develop and implement a French language arts achievement test at the grade 3 level.

Currently, grade 3 francophone students write the grade 3 English language arts test and the grade 3 mathematics test (translated into French). French language arts achievement tests are available at grades 6 and 9 as well as French versions of the mathematics, science and social studies tests at these grades. But there is no equivalent French language arts achievement test at the grade 3 level. In view of the importance of having a system-wide check on children's literacy and their ability to read by the time they leave grade 3, the Commission recommends that a grade 3 achievement test in French language arts be developed and implemented. This would replace the requirement for francophone children to write the grade 3 language arts achievement test in English.

57. Regularly report results from provincial achievement tests as part of ongoing reporting to parents and within a context that helps them understand and interpret the results.

While the Commission supports achievement tests, there are serious concerns about how the results are reported, particularly with the tendency for these results to be used to rank schools. Alberta Learning has consistently opposed the use of achievement tests for ranking schools and it clearly is not the purpose of the tests. A comprehensive communication plan should be in place for every school jurisdiction reinforcing the purpose of the tests, explaining the results, and putting them in a context with other factors that affect students' performance.

To improve the process of reporting results from provincial achievement tests, the Commission recommends that:

- Reporting results to the public, parents and school councils should provide a context to allow them to interpret the results in a comprehensive and constructive way. The focus should be on comparing year-over-year results and assessing the progress a school is making over time, not to compare one school to another. The results should be used to stimulate discussion among principals, teachers, parents and students about ways of improving student achievement.
- Information and explanation should be provided to expand the ability of school councils and individual parents to understand the objectives of provincial achievement tests, the content of the tests, and the context for interpreting the results.
- Results from provincial achievement tests should be combined with other types of quality indicators to provide a broader picture of school and school system performance. Other types of indicators should include:
  - Context indicators - demographics, unique characteristics, characteristics of students, community norms, resource constraints
  - Process indicators - culture of the school, vision, mission and goals, programs and services, policies and procedures, safe environment, and equity principles
  - Outcome indicators - parent and community satisfaction, parent and community views on effectiveness, cost efficiency and student success.

"... standardized testing today is often used to attack or punish educators and/or schools, but ... educators should not on that ground oppose testing; it is the use, not the test that we should oppose."

Covaleskie (2002, p. 1)

Maintain and continuously improve diploma exams

58. Maintain and enhance diploma exams and include a balance of multiple choice and written response questions in all subject areas.

Currently, all students write diploma exams in a set of courses required for a high school diploma. The exams certify that students have met the expected outcomes of the curriculum at the end of grade 12 and they count for half of students' final grades.

The Commission strongly supports diploma exams. The exams provide a consistent tool for assessing students' knowledge and abilities and improving curriculum, and are highly regarded by post-secondary institutions and potential employers. We believe that these exams should be maintained and continue to count for half of a student's final grade.

In order to enhance diploma exams on an ongoing basis, the Commission recommends that:

- Information about the format, content and achievement patterns of diploma examinations should be made available to teachers in a timely way to allow them to improve programs and make appropriate changes to courses of study, teaching practices and classroom assessments. While it is understandable that a certain number of exam questions should remain secure in order to provide comparable standards over time, the number of secure questions should be kept to the minimum required to ensure comparability.
- Teachers should be actively involved in the design and marking of diploma examinations as part of their professional responsibilities and as an important professional development activity.
- The feasibility of having diploma exams available on demand should be explored, provided that security can be maintained.
- All diploma exams should continue to include a balance of multiple choice and written response questions. The Commission strongly opposes any move to replace the current combination of multiple choice and written response questions with examinations that are completely machine scored and do not include written responses. Written response questions may be time-consuming to mark, but they allow students to demonstrate their skills in communication and critical thinking. The ability to think, communicate and explain a response to a question is just as important in mathematics and sciences as it is in social studies or language arts. These skills are also vitally important to students as they go on to post-secondary education and future careers. Given the importance of written extended response questions and the value of having teachers mark the responses, the Commission is confident that teachers will continue to willingly participate in marking diploma exams. Recommendations later in this report also suggest that marking diploma exams should become an explicit professional responsibility of teachers.

Support ongoing classroom assessment

59. Ensure that all teachers have access to high quality, performance-based and cutting-edge classroom assessment materials and practices.

No one is better able to assess the achievement of students than classroom teachers who work with students on a daily basis. Good assessments allow students to demonstrate what they know and can do, what concepts they have learned and how they can apply them in problem-solving situations. They go beyond simply assessing how well students remember what they learned yesterday and instead, test their understanding of the concepts and their ability to think, reason and create solutions.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of ongoing classroom assessment, the Commission suggests that:

- Teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development should be expanded to enhance teachers' capacity to assess student achievement and use those assessments to adjust their teaching practice and to continually improve students' results.
- Highly effective assessment tools such as those developed through the Classroom Assessment Materials Project (CAMP) should be continuously renewed and made available to all schools in formats that are easily accessible, including making them available online.
- The education partners involved in the Alberta Assessment Consortium should develop a comprehensive and ongoing program to support and improve the quality and authenticity of teacher-managed assessment and evaluation.
- The results from teacher-designed classroom assessments should be analyzed by teams of teachers at the elementary, junior high and senior high school levels in order to make good decisions about instructional improvement.
- Teachers and principals should work together as professional learning communities to diagnose problems, assess progress, make judgments based on data, and develop and implement successful diagnostic, formative and summative assessment tools.
- A wide range of assessment information should be used for regular communication with parents about their child's progress and the overall performance of students in the school.
- Regular use should be made of both large-scale provincial and teacher-generated assessment information and data as part of school improvement plans in all schools and school jurisdictions.
- Strong efforts should be made to de-mystify student assessment and enable parents to support the work of teachers and provide positive encouragement to their children.
- Teachers should help parents understand the expectations of the curriculum and their child's performance through the use of examples of student work at different levels of performance. By compiling portfolios of students' work, teachers and parents can review a child's progress over time.
- Teachers should also work with parents to identify tasks they can do at home to support and reinforce what children are learning at school.

Provide province-wide information and accountability

60. Provide ongoing, comprehensive, consistent and transparent information to Albertans about the outcomes achieved by Alberta's students.

On a regular basis, Albertans are informed about the achievement of our students, particularly when the results of provincial, national and international tests are released. Aside from that, the Commission understands that Alberta Learning and school jurisdictions currently collect a wide range of information but it's difficult to know how effectively that information is used to assess and continuously improve the education system.

The Commission believes that province-wide information systems should be in place to consistently track information about student achievement and report regularly to Albertans. The implementation of a student identification number is underway and is an important step, but more should be done to establish a student information system to provide consistent, regular and timely information on a province-wide basis. Expanding the student identification number to the post-secondary level would allow students' education experiences to be tracked over time and also provide students with a comprehensive record of their learning achievements.

In addition, there would be considerable merit in being able to identify and track the outcomes for students who are in special programs with targeted funding including special needs students, students with English as a second language, and Aboriginal students (as noted earlier). Provided that privacy concerns can be properly addressed, being able to identify and track these students' achievements over time would allow parents, teachers, administrators and school jurisdictions to assess the effectiveness of special programs and initiatives and see whether they are achieving the best possible outcomes for students.

With SuperNet, all schools and school jurisdictions should have the ability to report information online on key indicators of students' achievements across the province. This information should be provided to Albertans, to parents, students and community members on an ongoing basis so that they are able to assess the performance of the education system and hold the province, school jurisdictions and schools accountable for the results they achieve.

In addition to specific reporting requirements about student achievement, the last section of this report provides a more detailed listing of areas in which full and complete information should be reported on a regular basis.

Technology plus

In virtually every aspect of our society, our economy and our personal lives, technology is having a profound impact on the way people live, work, learn and do business. It seems that rarely a day goes by without some new development in technology, whether it's converging multimedia, new ways to communicate and explore ideas, or the availability of goods and services - including learning programs and digital content - anywhere, anytime.

As we noted in the early sections of our report, the explosion of new technologies and multimedia is expected to continue. Technology will be pervasive and a "given" in most children's lives, in their homes, their entertainment and their communication with friends and family. They will come to school with expectations that the same kinds of technology and multimedia will also be pervasive in their schools. Most, if not all, jobs and careers will require young people to have a range of skills in using technology and to continue learning new technology skills in the workplace. All Albertans, as lifelong learners, will use technology to develop skills and relationships, to gain, construct and share knowledge, to think critically, solve problems, and make decisions. The definition of literacy in the future is likely to include not just the ability to read and write, but also basic technological, visual and information literacy. With the rapid expansion of knowledge, students will need to be able to find, sort, assess, make decisions, and apply knowledge and information to a variety of problems and situations.

Schools have taken steps to expand students' access to computers and the Internet. On average, in 2001-02, there was one computer for just over every six students in schools across the province. An Information and Communications Technology curriculum also is in place for Alberta's schools, with a focus on ensuring that students are prepared to understand, use and apply information and communications technology in effective, efficient and ethical ways.

With the establishment of SuperNet, the provincial government will make Alberta a world-wide leader in access to high-speed broadband Internet connections. By 2004, SuperNet will be expanded to virtually every community in the province. The Commission commends the provincial government for its vision and foresight in developing SuperNet. It will open up a world of opportunities for network-enabled classrooms, schools and school jurisdictions.

In May 2003, a proposed Learning and Technology Policy Framework was released for discussion by Alberta Learning. The proposed framework indicates that "Technology can provide greater access to resources, expose students to real-world problems and authentic contexts for learning, and provide alternative methods of representing and communicating knowledge. It fosters innovation, facilitates dialogue and offers potential for developing new practices among the education and research communities."[79]

Specifically, technology offers the potential to:

- Increase access to learning opportunities
- Adapt teaching to different learning styles, preferences and paces
- Customize learning materials and services
- Provide access to interactive educational resources
- Expand research and knowledge creation
- Individualize the tracking and recording of students' progress
- Develop new learning communities for the sharing of knowledge and best practices
- Improve information management and administrative processes.

SuperNet will open up a world of opportunities for network-enabled classrooms, schools and school jurisdictions.

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[79] Alberta Learning (2003g, p. 1).

The Commission supports the overall goals and policy direction outlined in the proposed framework and encourages government to move ahead with implementation.

It's important to recognize that we are certainly not starting from scratch when it comes to the use and integration of technology. A number of important world-class initiatives currently are underway in the province.[80]

- Through LearnAlberta.ca, work is underway to provide online digital video, animations, lab demonstrations, simulations, interactive discovery tools, and reference materials that support what is taught in Alberta classrooms.
- The Alberta Online Consortium supports online course development and involves over 100 school jurisdictions across the province.
- About 4,700 full-time and 4,000 part-time students are enrolled in online learning through virtual schools operated in 20 school jurisdictions.
- The TELUS Learning Connection (Telus2Learn) works with teachers in the use of technology, providing professional support, curriculum and information and communications technology (ICT) support, opportunities for collaborative project development, and interactive online learning tools.
- Through the National Geographic Science Center, Alberta Learning and the National Geographic Society have signed an agreement to digitize selected National Geographic videos, GeoKits, teacher support materials, student activities and glossaries and correlate them with Alberta's science curriculum.
- The Galileo Educational Network provides leadership in the identification of effective strategies for ICT implementation and professional development.
- An e-textbook pilot project is underway to develop an electronic version of grade 9 science textbooks.
- Many of the projects supported under the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement relate to the integration of technology in the classroom.

In addition to these province-wide initiatives, a number of school jurisdictions have taken the lead in establishing virtual schools and providing support to their teachers and schools in the integration of technology. For example, the Calgary Board of Education's ICT Cyberspace provides web-based support for teachers to assist in integrating technology in their classrooms. Through the Rural Advanced Community of Learners (RACOL) initiative, the Ft. Vermilion School Division, in partnership with the University of Alberta, is able to connect students and teachers who may be great distances apart using a high speed broadband network to provide real time teaching and learning. With a Virtual Presence Learning Environment in place, students and teachers have access to broadcast quality video and audio, interactive whiteboards, and expert systems to manage the environment. The Learning Live project in the Red Deer Catholic School Division involves the delivery of curriculum from the Red Deer Notre Dame High School in Red Deer to the St. Matthew School in Rocky Mountain House.

Alberta is certainly not alone in exploring and adapting technologies to expand access, provide innovative approaches, and improve students' learning and critical thinking skills. In the US, the CEO Forum - a five-year partnership between business and education leaders - examined the use of technology in schools. Their report concluded that, instead of teaching technology for its own sake, technology should be integrated into all areas of the curriculum to make content more challenging and engaging for the student. In their view, we need to stop wondering if we should implement technology into schools and start wondering how to implement it to best attain educational objectives.[81]

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[80] For a complete list of the various projects and initiatives underway, check the Learning and Technology Policy Framework available online at the Alberta Learning website.

[81] CEO Forum (2001).

This need to get on with it and do it right is a key message in our report. From the Commission's perspective, we've called this section "Technology Plus" for several important reasons.

First, we're not looking at technology as a replacement for teachers. Technology is a tool that, if used appropriately, can improve teachers' teaching and students' learning. We also are not advocating wholesale self-directed learning where technology replaces teacher-led classroom experiences. This may be the preference for a number of students involved in virtual schools, but it is unlikely to ever be the norm for the vast majority of students and, even in virtual schools, the guidance of and connection to teachers is critical to students' success.

We envision classrooms in the future where technology is fully integrated as a teaching and learning tool. Teachers become designers, coordinators, facilitators, guides, learners, and knowledge builders in their students' ongoing learning. Students in the future are expected to be knowledge-builders and "cognitive apprentices" - able to think, organize and analyze information and ideas, generate questions, investigate and do research, invent new ideas, and solve problems. Rather than simply receiving information, they will be expected to become "infotectives" - investigating and seeking information and using that information to uncover solutions.

Second, it's not good enough to simply add more computers to schools. Unless technology is integrated throughout the classroom experience and teachers are provided with adequate support to make it work and work well, the full potential of using technology to improve learning will not be achieved.

Third, technology has the potential to give students access to hands-on, real-life projects to expand their learning and connect them to experts anywhere around the world. Research suggests that students learn better through project-based learning where they are actively engaged in projects that make sense to them and involve seeking information, solving problems and building knowledge. The objective, then, is not just to use technology for drills and practice but to fundamentally change how curriculum is delivered and to improve students' achievement.[82]

Fourth, technology has the potential for improving access to first-class learning opportunities, especially in rural communities. Throughout its consultations, the Commission heard concerns about the challenges small schools in rural Alberta face in trying to provide a comprehensive range of programs and courses for their students, especially at the high school level. There also are challenges in providing counselling and other specialized services for students, ongoing professional development for teachers, and effective administration. The Commission believes that technology has the potential to help address each of these challenges and improve education in rural communities.

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82 Laferrière (2003) Presentation to the Commission.

Goals

- Technology is used effectively as a powerful tool for improving the achievement of students. Students improve their learning with technology, not their learning about technology.
- All students have access to computers and information and communications technology as tools for learning, including doing research, seeking and analyzing information, creating new insights and ideas, and applying what they learn.
- Technology provides an opportunity for teachers and principals to share best practices, participate in professional development, and continuously improve their students' outcomes.
- Technology is used to improve access to quality education in rural and remote communities.
- Integrated technology and information systems are in place to support improvements in efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in the education system.
- Alberta plays a leadership role in Canada in the effective use of technology to improve teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Learn with technology not about technology

61. Implement the proposed Learning and Technology Policy Framework and take action to fully integrate the use of technology in every classroom over the next five years.

Rather than being the focus of a separate course, technology should be fully integrated as a vibrant teaching and learning tool in every classroom in the province. To use a simple illustration, integrating technology isn't about learning how to use PowerPoint software. It's about using PowerPoint and other communications tools to describe what students have learned, summarize key points and communicate effectively.

Students and teachers should be expected to use technology and telecommunications for a variety of purposes including:

- Enhancing learning
- Promoting creativity
- Collaborating, publishing and interacting
- Communicating information and ideas
- Locating, evaluating and collecting information and preparing reports
- Simulating different situations and modelling various solutions
- Using information and evidence to create new insights and ideas
- Solving problems and making informed decisions.

Students should be able to use technology to search for information, use online resources, undertake projects, and share their learning with their teachers and other students. It should enable them to access online resources, courses and information anytime rather than only during the school day.

Technology can also be used for telementoring, linking students with knowledgeable adult volunteers who can provide career guidance, academic advice, direction on specific projects and tasks, or support for students to carry out ambitious projects and long-term investigations. It also could be used by parents and students to maintain students' learning during the summer months so that gains made in the previous year are not compromised or lost over the summer. Teachers should be able to plan and organize their teaching with full access to technology as a tool for their students' and their own learning. Technology should also allow teachers to expand their assessment of a wide range of students' skills. And it should allow parents to participate in their children's education by providing support, communicating with teachers, and checking homework and assignments online.

62 Set province-wide standards for the types of technology that should be available in every classroom.

Access to technology varies greatly across the province. Initially, when computers were introduced in schools, they often were placed in computer labs where students had limited access and only at certain times. The next stage was to move computers into the classroom where they were more readily available for both students and teachers and could be more easily integrated into all aspects of teaching and learning. The ideal is to have a computer available for every teacher and a reasonable number of computers available for student use. While some have suggested that every student should have a computer, this likely is not necessary and perhaps not even ideal. Researchers have learned that access does not necessarily require a computer on every desk. Some research suggests that a ratio of one computer for five students would assure students "near universal access."[83]

The Commission believes that province-wide standards should be set and understands that work is already underway under the leadership of Alberta Learning. The standards should ensure that all students have reasonable access to technology at no cost to them. At a minimum, classrooms should have:

One computer for the teacher
Several computers for student use
A projection system
An interactive whiteboard
Online resources.

In addition to these basic classroom requirements, schools should have access to other related equipment including a digital and a video camera, conferencing hardware and software, as well as regular equipment such as microscopes and lab equipment. These proposed standards are based on standards currently in place in the United Kingdom.[84]

For a variety of reasons, the Commission believes that these standards should be phased in over five years. The costs of implementing the standards immediately would be substantial and would result in significant replacement costs if all equipment requires updating at the same time. Online resources and software need to be developed. Furthermore, simply having the technology in schools and classrooms is not sufficient to guarantee its effective use. The critical factor is ensuring that teachers are well prepared to fully integrate technology into their teaching practices.

"Alberta schools currently do not possess the capacity to transform teaching and learning using technology. They are not adequately resourced, either to provide equitable access for learners, or to tap the bountiful curriculum, assessment and learning opportunities inherent in technology."

College of Alberta School Superintendents (2002, p. 8)

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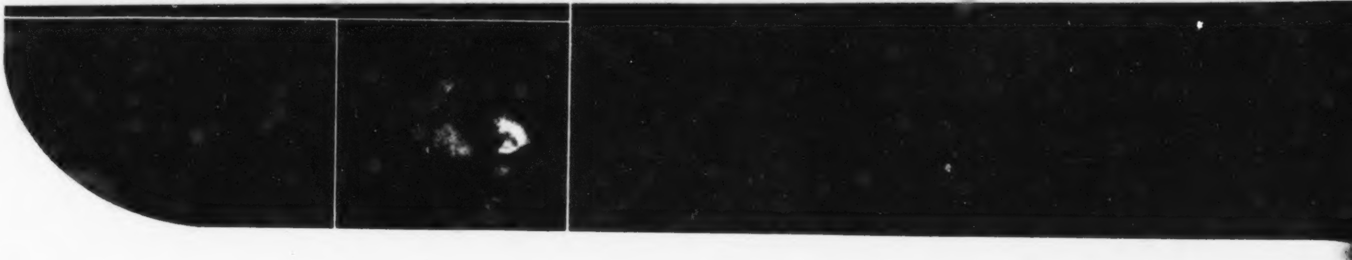
[83] Statham & Torell (1999) cited in Ringstaff & Kelley (2002, p. 18).

[84] Becta (2003).



"Technology integration cannot be acheived simply by decree and by providing hardware in schools."

Alberta Teachers' Association (2002, p. 29)

63. Expect principals to provide proactive leadership in integrating technology in both the instructional and administrative aspects of the school.

Strong and positive leadership from principals is key to successful schools, and the integration of technology is no exception. For technology to be integrated and used effectively in schools, principals must provide the necessary leadership and support collaborative efforts among teachers. Professional development should be available for teachers, principals and vice-principals to promote the use of technology for creative, higher-order thinking. The successful integration of technology should be a key part of professional learning communities in every school.

Prepare teachers for integrating technology

64. Require all teachers to be proficient in the integrated use of technology in their teaching and ensure that they have the necessary support in their classrooms.

To successfully integrate technology in the classroom, teachers should be expected to:

- Demonstrate a sound understanding of technology and electronic media operations and concepts
- Plan and design effective learning environments and experiences supported by technology
- Implement curriculum plans and strategies for applying technology to maximize student learning
- Apply technology to facilitate a variety of effective assessment and evaluation strategies
- Use technology to enhance their productivity and their professional practice
- Access online resources both for their students and for their own professional development
- Understand the social, ethical, legal and human issues involved in the use of technology in schools and apply that understanding in practice.

Achieving these expectations should be a professional responsibility of all teachers. Teachers, especially beginning teachers, should also receive adequate support in the classroom from parents, principals and administration, colleagues, counsellors, online resources, community agencies and programs, call centres, and mentors. In addition, teachers and students should have access to appropriate library resources online to support print materials and library collections.

65. Model the appropriate application of technology in all teacher preparation programs and provide adequate, ongoing professional development.

Teacher preparation programs currently are provided by universities through an agreement with the Minister of Learning. Their students are expected to have all the skills outlined in the Teaching Quality Standard for the province, including the ability to apply a variety of technologies to meet students' learning needs. While all teacher preparation programs provide some courses on the use of technology, few model and integrate the full potential of technology in courses taught by university faculty members. The same can be said for other post-secondary programs as well. For this reason, earlier recommendations in this report point to the need to examine the use of technology as part of an overall review of the post-secondary system.

In addition to preservice programs, inservice and professional development activities should be available for teachers to allow them to keep up to date on the latest developments, to share best practices, and to access online resources for their students and themselves. This should be included in professional development plans for schools and individual teachers.

Use technology to improve access

66. Expand the use of technology to improve access to education programs and related services in rural and remote communities.

Rural and remote schools face a number of challenges in providing the full range of courses for very few students, in attracting and retaining teachers especially in some subject areas like math and science, and in accessing related services their students need such as counselling or diagnosis of learning problems. Especially with SuperNet in place, the opportunities to address these challenges through technology should be expanded. Technology can be used to bring online courses to students, access specialist teachers in other centres, connect students and teachers to experts and mentors, or provide counselling services through videoconferencing. These approaches are being used in the health care system through what is called "telehealth" and could also be used to improve access to high quality education programs and services.

Provide adequate support

67. Provide adequate funding not only for the purchase of hardware and software but also for necessary technical support, training, and continuous upgrading of equipment.

It takes resources and an ongoing investment in technology to ensure that Alberta is a leader in innovation, not only in schools but in all sectors of our economy. Simply purchasing the equipment and placing it in schools isn't enough. Both technical support and training have to be available. Adequate resources also have to be available to upgrade equipment on a regular basis and to purchase the necessary software and online learning resources. As noted earlier, the Commission believes that funding to implement the standards proposed in our report should be phased in over the next five years. In addition to funding from the provincial government, school jurisdictions and schools should also pursue partnerships with local community organizations, businesses and individuals.

68. Regularly assess the effectiveness of new technology and applications and provide advice to school boards to guide their decisions about the purchase of new technology.

There are constant changes in technology and it's difficult to keep pace with the latest models and developments. Equipment is expensive, and schools are not in a position to replace all of their equipment as soon as a new model is introduced. Alberta Learning, along with teachers and administrators, could play an important role in testing new equipment, software and online resources and providing timely advice to school boards to guide their purchasing decisions. This would save time and expense and ensure that the most effective technology tools are used in Alberta's schools. The Commission understands that work is underway through Alberta Learning to establish province-wide technology standards and implement standard solutions. Ongoing research should also be done on the effectiveness of different approaches using technology to improve students' learning and achievement.

Excellent teachers and school leaders

Teaching is a difficult and consuming, but ultimately rewarding, profession. Doing it well requires intelligence, dedication, insight and collaboration.

"For most of us, it was in school - under the guidance of our teachers - that we learned to get along with one another. It was there that we learned to be compassionate and tolerant, to celebrate the diversity of our world, and to work together to make it a better place. It was our teachers who showed us how to let our imaginations soar. They taught us to think and analyze and make decisions for ourselves. And they prepared us for the world of work."[85]

That description sums up the views of many Albertans about the important role teachers play not only in teaching students but in shaping the way people live, learn and work.

Within the more traditional scope of what most people think of as teaching, Alberta's teachers are expected to keep pace with changing expectations, ensure their students achieve the expected outcomes of the curriculum, engage in ongoing professional development, work along with fellow teachers to improve the overall achievement of children in their school, analyze information and make plans, communicate clearly and frequently with parents, develop challenging assignments and mark the results, then participate in extracurricular and professional activities.

Teaching is a difficult and consuming, but ultimately rewarding, profession. Doing it well requires intelligence, dedication, insight and collaboration. Alberta is fortunate to have well-trained, highly skilled and committed teachers, principals, superintendents and others in leadership positions in the education system. Albertans definitely should be grateful for the exceptional work teachers do for our children every day.

At the same time, it's clear that teaching is an increasingly complex and demanding profession. Alberta's classrooms are more diverse than in the past. Children come to our schools with a rich range of abilities, skills, languages, cultures and family backgrounds. Future trends suggest that diversity will increasingly be a defining feature of Alberta's classrooms as the province welcomes people from countries around the world. This is particularly true for the province's major urban centres.

Teachers also must deal with a range of issues that go well beyond making sure their students can read, get their homework done or pass a tough test. They regularly deal with children who live in poverty, children who come to school hungry, and children with unique and very challenging special needs. They see the impact of bullying and violence and do their best to intervene. They challenge gifted students and recognize the special talents of others.

In view of these challenges and the importance of achieving the very best outcomes for children, it is critical that preservice education programs and ongoing professional development activities provide the kind of preparation and support teachers need.

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[85] ASBA (2002, p. 38).

The same is true for principals, superintendents and others in leadership positions in schools. As one US report suggests, "Today's principals face a daunting situation: they shoulder greater responsibility than ever before - now typically including politics, security, public relations, finances, personnel, and technology. They have, in effect, become CEOs of small public businesses whose chief product is learning. They are profoundly accountable for their results."[86] As for superintendents, the same report goes on to say, "As the principal's job has been redefined, so has the superintendent's. No longer does he or she merely 'run' a 'system.' Doing that job well today means intervening in faltering schools, mediating between school and state, collaborating with business, civic, and municipal leaders, engaging in complex labour relations, making tough decisions about priorities, finding resources, and selecting first-rate leaders for every school in the system. These skills are the core of what superintendents must do in today's world ..."[87]

Looking ahead to the future, we cannot develop the schools we need or achieve the results we want for our children without the finest teachers, principals, and superintendents.

Goals

- **Alberta's teachers are well prepared for the challenges of teaching and meeting the diverse needs of their students.**
- **Ongoing professional development activities ensure that Alberta's teachers keep pace with the latest research and innovations and translate that into strategies that constantly improve the outcomes for their students.**
- **Alberta's principals provide strong and effective leadership to professional learning communities in every school across the province.**
- **Superintendents are highly skilled and visionary leaders, putting their schools and their students' achievement at the forefront.**
- **Alberta's post-secondary institutions continuously review and improve education programs for teachers and leaders in Alberta's schools.**

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[86] The Broad Foundation and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2003, p. 17).

[87]

Recommendations

Improve teacher preparation programs and experiences for beginning teachers

"Too often, teachers who have insufficient background or training in the rapidly evolving discipline of special education are required to develop and implement highly specialized instruction and modified programs."

Alberta Teachers' Association (2002, p. 12)

69. Review and improve current preservice programs for teachers to ensure that they provide excellent preparation for Alberta's beginning teachers.

The Commission consistently heard strong support for Alberta's teachers and the work they do with children in schools across the province. That would suggest that their university programs generally have prepared them well for the challenges they face.

At the same time, the teaching profession has become far more demanding and complex. The Commission heard about the need for better preparation for teachers in several areas.

- **Special education** - The Commission heard over and over again concerns about the need for better preparation for teachers in integrating special needs children while, at the same time, maintaining a sound program for the other children in the class. Specifically, teachers need skills in:
    - Developing and implementing individual program plans for children with special needs
    - Working with teaching assistants assigned to children with special needs
        - Assisting them in furthering their knowledge and skills
        - Working with them on implementing and adjusting individual education plans
        - Selecting effective teaching and learning aids
        - Helping them become effective and active members of the learning team
    - Communicating effectively with parents in developing and implementing individual program plans and engaging them in the process
    - Communicating with parents on students' progress and actions that will be taken to improve student performance
    - Collaborating with other professionals.

- **Pluralism and multicultural education** - Teachers need better preparation on how to respond to the challenge of the growing diversity of children in their schools. They need to recognize and respond to the different ways children learn, the changing needs and diversity of their students, their different backgrounds, and the many different languages and cultures they may encounter in the classroom. In terms of First Nations and Métis children, teachers need a better understanding of the sociological implications of Aboriginal backgrounds, training in effective teaching practices for Aboriginal students, adapting programs to meet their needs, and communicating effectively with Aboriginal parents.

- **Communication with parents** - Teachers are expected to keep parents well informed and actively involved in the education and progress of their children. This occurs not just at regular parent-teacher conferences, but on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Teachers need strong skills in communicating objectives and results, explaining expectations, responding to parents' questions and concerns, and engaging them in continuous improvement planning for their children. Effective communications with parents can also help teachers learn about their students' backgrounds, experiences, and interests.

- **Adequate subject-area preparation** - All teachers need extensive knowledge in the subject areas they are expected to teach. Teachers of mathematics should have a high level of knowledge and expertise in math. The same is true for teachers of language arts, science, social studies, fine arts, second languages, or physical education. It also applies to areas of expertise such as early childhood or teaching children with special needs.

- **Effective assessment techniques** - Assessing students' achievement is a complex and challenging task that involves more than simply preparing a test and marking the students' answers. Teachers need to understand how to define expectations, construct assessment tools, measure student learning against expectations, make data-driven decisions, and communicate results to students and their parents. They also need better training in how to use the achievement data and results of province-wide testing programs to assess their students' learning and develop action plans to adjust their teaching practice as necessary.

- **Using technology as a teaching and learning tool** - Technology is a tremendous tool for teaching and learning, but it involves much more than simply teaching students how to keyboard or sitting them in front of a computer so they can do drills and practice or write reports. Teachers need to understand more than simply how to use a computer. They need better preparation in how to integrate technology as a tool in their classrooms and how to get the maximum benefit for their students in terms of using technology to gain, share and build knowledge.

- **Leading in learning communities** - The vision for Alberta's schools involves every school operating as a professional learning community. This means teachers are actively engaged and involved in working together to continuously improve the outcomes for all students in the school. Too often, teachers work in isolation in their own classrooms with only occasional collaboration with their fellow teachers. For a professional learning community, teachers need experience and support in how to work collaboratively, share insights and ideas, and work as a team to achieve the best results in their schools.

- **Gaining skills instead of just taking courses** - To develop the necessary skills, student teachers need more than university courses and lectures. There needs to be a close and consistent link between what they learn and how they apply it in the classroom. They need continuous, consistent and well-planned experience in the classroom, working with excellent teachers, practicing and developing their teaching skills, and taking time to share experiences and reflect on their work. They need ongoing coaching from faculty members. There needs to be clear link between the knowledge, skills and attributes expected of teachers and their preparation programs, both in their practical experience and in the courses they take. In effect, the best aspects of professional learning communities should be mirrored in teacher preparation programs.

In addition to these specific areas, it also is important for faculty members in teacher preparation programs to be in tune with the changing reality of children in Alberta's classrooms. Faculty members must act as role models for beginning teachers, reflecting best practices in classroom teaching and balancing their research role with an emphasis on teaching.

Currently, three universities and two university colleges provide teacher preparation programs in Alberta. These programs are operated under an agreement with the Minister of Learning, who is responsible for certifying teachers in the province. The agreement identifies the outcomes expected for beginning teachers and requires each of the Deans of Education to formally certify that the students he or she recommends meet the requirements of Alberta's Teaching Quality Standard. The programs vary in length and in approach.

As part of its review, the Commission met with representatives of the faculties of education and heard from superintendents and others on the importance of well-prepared teachers. The result was somewhat mixed reviews for current teacher preparation programs with some being very highly regarded while others were not. Generally, programs with clear links between students' courses and their practical experience in schools were rated more positively.

Surveys of recent graduates from all five teacher preparation programs indicated that, overall, graduates feel that Alberta's teacher preparation programs have prepared them at a satisfactory level in all areas of the knowledge, skills and attributes expected of teachers. In a number of areas, recent graduates commented that they did not feel as well prepared. Examples included developing skills in analyzing and using the results of provincial and other large-scale assessment instruments, learning how to engage their students in using technologies, placing more emphasis on a broad range of instructional strategies, and promoting partnerships. In most cases, they rated their field experiences as making a greater contribution to their learning than their campus-based experiences, even though they spent far more time on campus than in the field.[88] In addition to this survey, teachers who were recently certified agreed with extending field experiences in teacher preparation programs. They also recommended more work in classroom management and an expanded focus on assessment and special needs education.[89]

Many superintendents feel that teacher preparation programs need to be improved. They suggest there should be:

- More consultation with school jurisdictions that employ beginning teachers
- Relevant and extended practicum experiences
- Closer coordination between the field experience and the campus experience
- A better balance between theory and practice
- Improved skills in:
  - student assessment, evaluation and reporting
  - differentiated instruction
  - integrating students with special needs
  - developing individual program plans
- More promotion of rural and remote practicum experiences.

The Commission believes that teacher preparation programs have not changed as quickly as the profession of teaching has, and, as a result, there are some areas where the preparation of teachers has not fully kept up with the demands. For this reason, the Commission recommends that a review of all teacher preparation programs be undertaken. The review should involve superintendents, principals, teachers who work with beginning teachers, and beginning teachers themselves. It should assess:

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[88] Working Group (2002).
[89] R.A. Malatest & Associates (2003, p. 23).

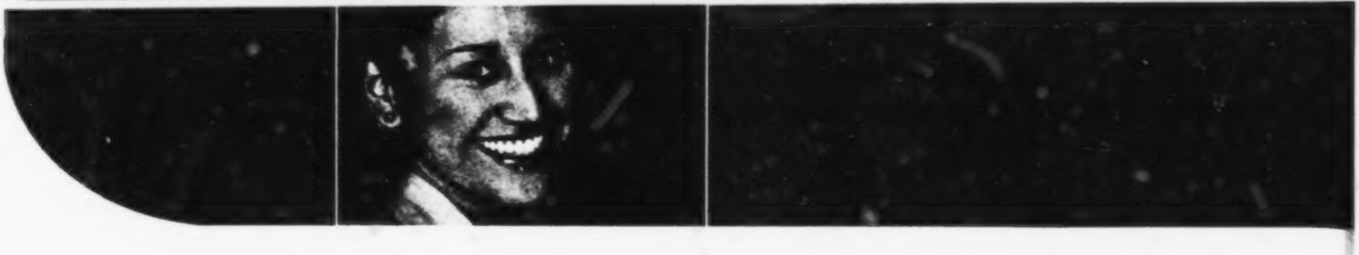
- How well beginning teachers are prepared in relation to the knowledge, skills and attributes required in Alberta's Teaching Quality Standard
- What additional steps need to be taken to address key areas such as preparation for meeting the needs of special education students, Aboriginal children, and children who are new to Canada
- What progress is being made in ensuring that beginning teachers are able to fully integrate the use of technology into their classroom practice
- What can be done to ensure that education faculties continue to evolve and share best practices with one another
- What steps should be taken to attract and retain teachers in rural and remote communities. This could include initiatives such as providing access to full programs offered outside of the major urban centres, increasing practicum experiences in rural communities, and working with school jurisdictions and communities to facilitate rural practicum experiences.

70. Establish a permanent mechanism for ensuring a closer link among faculties of education, superintendents, teachers, and Alberta Learning.

The Commission believes that, on an ongoing basis, there needs to be a clearer link between the faculties of education, Alberta Learning, experienced teachers, and school jurisdictions that provide practicum experiences and hire graduating teachers. While the agreement between the faculties and the Minister of Learning specifies the outcomes to be achieved, it does not specify how those outcomes are to be achieved. Faculties have complete discretion in designing their own programs. While this is a positive feature in that it encourages flexibility and innovation, faculties are not required to consult or advise either the Minister or superintendents on major changes to their programs. There isn't a consistent mechanism in place to allow superintendents and Alberta Learning to provide advice to the faculties of education on changing policies, new directions, and changing expectations for teachers.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that a mechanism such as a joint committee involving faculties of education, superintendents, teachers and Alberta Learning should be put in place to review teacher preparation issues on an ongoing basis, to share information, and to ensure that Alberta's teachers are well prepared. Specifically, a joint committee should be responsible for reviewing and monitoring issues related to:

- Teacher supply and demand by various disciplines
- Changing expectations of teachers
- Experiences of beginning teachers
- Best practices in the preparation of teachers
- Ongoing evaluation of teacher preparation programs.



71. Require school jurisdictions to adapt the first-year experience and provide effective coaching for beginning teachers.

With even the best teacher preparation programs in place, the first year for beginning teachers can be overwhelming. Too often, they are given challenging assignments with little support at their school, from their school jurisdiction, or from their professional association. Too often, the 'drop and run' approach places beginning teachers into the classroom, assumes they'll perform like seasoned veterans, and leaves them alone to face an enormous challenge. As one article describes it, "When the actual task of teaching one's own class begins, most beginning teachers seem to hit the wall known as the first-year phenomenon, a time of disillusionment, failure, and shattered idealism."[90]

As a result, there is a high turnover of beginning teachers who leave the profession within the first few years of teaching. Studies from the US suggest that about one-third of beginning teachers leave the profession within the first three years and almost half may leave within the first five years.[91] Across Canada, a study done for the Canadian Teachers' Federation showed that, in 2000, about six in ten of the 1995 graduates from elementary and secondary teacher education degree programs were employed as full-time elementary and secondary teachers five years after graduation. Almost one quarter of the 1995 graduates never went into teaching at all.[92]

While specific results for Alberta are not known, they likely are similar. This is a tremendous loss to the individuals involved, the teaching profession, and the education system.

The Commission believes that several steps could be taken to address this problem.

- Schools should consider adapting the assignment of beginning teachers and providing additional time for them to develop their skills as teachers.
- Across the school system, deliberate plans should be in place for welcoming beginning teachers, monitoring their progress, and working with them on an ongoing basis to ease the transition. This is especially important in rural and remote communities where beginning teachers may not have experience living and working in smaller communities.
- As part of a professional learning community, beginning teachers should have opportunities to work with coaches and experienced teachers to hone, develop and continuously improve their skills.
- The potential for re-introducing an internship program for teachers should be explored. An internship program was in place in the past in Alberta and, while there were strengths to the approach, there also were abuses where beginning teachers were paid less than a full salary but given full assignments and little support. A well-designed and monitored internship program would provide an effective way of easing the transition for beginning teachers. Several programs currently provide opportunities for beginning teachers to have an initial internship in May and June after they graduate from university and this could be expanded as part of an internship program. A well-designed pilot project would also be one way of assessing the impact of alternative approaches for an internship program.

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[90] Russell et al. (2001, p. 42). [91] National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003, p. 10).
[92] CTF (2003b, p. 40).

Expand professional development

72. Develop and implement comprehensive professional development plans for every school jurisdiction and every school.

"High quality teaching in all classrooms and skillful leadership in all schools will not occur by accident."[93] Ongoing professional development is essential to ensure that teachers, schools, and school systems continue to adapt and achieve the best outcomes for students.

Research suggests that, to be most effective, professional development should occur on an ongoing basis, it should be focused and targeted at specific challenges in a school, and it should engage teachers in continuous improvement. Traditional off-site conferences may provide opportunities for teachers to learn about new trends and ideas, to hear inspiring speakers, or to see the latest in classroom resources, but they do not necessarily result in changes in classroom practice or better outcomes for students. On the other hand, school-based activities that are part of a deliberate plan allow for collaborative program development and problem solving, mentoring, coaching and peer observations.

New views on professional development have led to the development of a wide range of options and opportunities to enhance professional knowledge and skills. The major models include training, observation and assessment, involvement in a development process, study groups, inquiry/action research, individually guided activities, and mentoring.[94] These models can be site-based, provided across school jurisdictions, or a combination of both.

While there are undoubtedly many well-planned and effective professional development plans across the province, the Commission heard concerns that professional development activities are not always clearly connected to the challenges in specific schools or to the priorities of school jurisdictions. Professional development may amount to a series of inspirational speakers combined with the annual teachers' conventions. As the ATA notes, "The professional development available to teachers and principals generally consists of a single event in which there is no follow-up or support for change."[95]

The Commission believes that every school system and every school should develop and implement a targeted professional development plan as a key part of its role as a professional learning community. Professional development plans should identify the challenges to be addressed and the activities to be undertaken. Adequate time should be made available to incorporate professional development as part of a school's ongoing activities. For example, some schools have adjusted their timetables to provide for weekly or monthly professional development activities. The Commission acknowledges that there may be costs involved in expanding professional development activities. This is a critical investment that will provide direct benefits to teachers, schools, and most importantly, to students.

> *"Evidence abounds of the significance of the relationship between the content of staff development, the quality of the staff development, and student achievement, so long as staff development adheres to certain principles that emphasize school-level control, focus on student learning and instruction, a commitment of time and resources to implement development over an extended period of time, and the development of professional development styles that engage teachers collaboratively rather than focusing on them as individuals."*
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> **Ulrich C. Reitzug (2002, p. 124)**

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[93] ATA (2002, p. 33).

[94] Guskey (2000, p. 22).

[95] ATA (2002, p. 33).

While priority areas for professional development will vary according to needs across the province, the Commission feels there is a pressing need for professional development in the areas of:

- Special education
- Education of First Nations and Métis children
- Use of data and evidence from large-scale and ongoing classroom assessments to guide decisions and improve practice
- Integration of technology as a teaching and learning tool
- Engaging parents and communities.

Because of the importance of professional development, schools and school boards should be required to report annually on their professional development plans including the objectives set, the time allocated, actions taken, resources provided, and the results achieved.

In addition to school-based professional development, under current legislation, all teachers are entitled to attend an annual two-day teachers' convention. Many teachers look forward to those two days as an opportunity to share experiences with colleagues and to learn about new approaches, innovations, and learning resources.

However, based on research on the most effective professional development activities, it is clear that the importance of school and school system professional development outweighs the value of one-time, off-site conferences. Given the limited time in the school year, the Commission's view is that these two days would be better spent providing professional development at the beginning of every school year or providing ongoing time for professional development throughout the year. Therefore, the Commission believes that the legislated requirement for an annual teachers' convention should be removed from the School Act to provide greater flexibility in meeting the professional development needs of teachers and schools.

The Alberta Teachers' Association plays an important role in professional development for teachers but unfortunately, much of their work in this area is not well known, aside from the teachers who are directly involved. The ATA should continue to play an active role in professional development activities, partnering with schools and school boards, working with their specialist councils, and providing ongoing leadership in this area.

73. Require all teachers to have targeted annual professional development plans that are directly linked to their schools' improvement plans.

Currently, every teacher is required to have an annual professional development plan. The Commission feels that these annual professional development plans would be strengthened by:

- Focusing the plans on ways of continuously improving the teacher's knowledge, skills and attributes
- Linking the plan to ongoing evaluation of a teacher's performance
- Linking the plans to overall school and school system improvement plans

In addition, school principals should be able to identify areas where teachers should undertake further professional development in order to improve and expand their skills.

Ensure competent teachers for every student

74. Ensure that policies and regulations on supervising and evaluating teachers are well understood and effectively implemented.

Alberta's children deserve no less than the best and most capable teachers. The vast majority of teachers in the province would certainly meet that expectation.

Nonetheless, the Commission heard repeated concerns about the challenges involved in dealing with the competence of teachers. The perception certainly is that, once teachers are hired on a permanent basis, it is almost impossible to dismiss them even if their performance is less than adequate. Stakeholders such as the ATA, the ASBA and school superintendents acknowledge that there are processes in place for dealing with concerns about the competency of teachers. The provincial Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy provides a process for reviewing the competence and performance of teachers on an ongoing basis. The Practice Review of Teachers Regulation is intended to provide any individual with the opportunity to make a complaint about unskilled or incompetent teaching practice to the Registrar for Teacher Certification. If the results of an investigation warrant, a practice review panel is set up to hear the complaint.

Unfortunately, the Commission heard that, when disciplinary actions are involved, the current processes can be onerous, costly and time-consuming, they are not well known, nor are they frequently used. When teachers are found to be less than capable, the most common practice is to try to counsel them out of the profession rather than going through an extensive dismissal process.

The Commission believes that one of the most important responsibilities of principals and school system administrators is to regularly evaluate the performance of all teachers. They should be accountable for ensuring that every child in the province is taught by a capable and competent teacher. While the processes may be time consuming, that is not unique to the teaching profession. In fact most employment situations require high standards and fair treatment before employees can be dismissed. Principals should receive training and support in how to address concerns with the competence and performance of their teachers including how to deal with progressive discipline and eventual dismissal. School jurisdictions and administrators should be more responsive to the legitimate views of parents when consistent concerns are expressed about a teacher's competence.

75. Replace the current Board of Reference process with an arbitration process that is consistent with models in place for employees who have the right to bargain collectively in the province.

Established in 1927, the Board of Reference is a unique process for resolving disputes between teachers and school boards over disciplinary actions such as suspensions and terminations. It was established at a time when there were few other processes in place to protect teachers' interests. Since then, the process has been modified but retained in legislation.

A sample of the views on the Board of Reference shows the sharp contrast in opinion on its effectiveness. The ATA describes the process as "a cost effective and efficient means of resolving contract disputes" while school boards suggest that the Board of Reference process is "time-consuming, costly and frustrating."

Alberta's children deserve no less than the best and most capable teachers.

In the Commission's view, the current Board of Reference process is cumbersome at best. There are also serious concerns with the fact that, at the end of a lengthy process, school boards can be required to reinstate a teacher - in effect, sending that person back into the same situation where his or her performance was considered grounds for suspension or dismissal. (It should be noted, however, that this could also happen with collective agreement arbitration processes where employees can be reinstated if no just cause for the disciplinary action is found.) The fact that the Board of Reference has the same powers as a board of inquiry means that it has a very wide scope in the information it can request, adding time and expense to the process.

In the Commission's view, the model provisions of the Labour Relations Code provide ample protection for teachers and there no longer is any need for a separate process. A board of arbitration is a clear and accepted process for resolving disputes. It is well known to all parties and it is currently used for other issues. Implementing this process for teachers would eliminate the need for a separate regulatory process. An arbitration process should be developed through collective bargaining or by regulation, and a consistent approach should be in place across the province. It should also include steps that could be taken prior to formal arbitration as a way of resolving disputes.

Recognize and support the leadership role of principals

76. Develop a quality practice standard and identify the knowledge, skills and attributes required for principals.

The role of today's school principal is challenging indeed. It has gone beyond organizing and managing a school to leading a diverse and challenging education enterprise.

Views on what is required to be a good principal in the classrooms of today and tomorrow have certainly changed. With a move to professional learning communities, the principal's leadership role is even more critical. As Michael Fullan notes, "Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement. ... at the heart of school capacity are principals focused on the development of teachers' knowledge and skills, professional community, program coherence, and technical resources."[96]

In addition to their role as leaders in a professional learning community, principals are expected to handle public relations, communicate with parents and community members, contribute to school board policy direction and initiatives, manage substantial budgets often in the millions of dollars, evaluate staff, ensure their schools are safe and secure ... and on top of all that, get to know their students, manage discipline, and motivate them to achieve their best. They are expected to align key strategies for improving students' achievement, supervising and evaluating teachers, developing professional learning communities, involving

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96 Fullan (2002, p. 16).

parents and communities, and allocating resources wisely, with an effective and efficient school organization, a clear vision and set of goals, and remarkable skills in motivating, communicating, and encouraging innovation.

While the primary role of principals continues to be one of learning leader, it's clear that, in the challenging environment of today's schools, their role extends well beyond those responsibilities. Principals must have a deep understanding of teaching and learning. To be successful, they must also have many of the skills required of the best leaders - leaders who combine personal humility with professional will, and who are "infected with an incurable need to produce sustained results."[97]

The Commission believes that a clear statement of the knowledge, skills and attributes of principals is required and should form the basis for preparing, recruiting and assessing their performance.

77. Establish a new program to prepare and certify principals.

Most principals in the province have a Masters degree in education or are pursuing one. The problem is that these programs are not specifically targeted at the knowledge, skills and attributes principals need to be effective. They tend to be research-based and focused on educational theory and knowledge. While this aspect is important, it does not adequately prepare them for complex roles as communicators, supervisors, motivators, and community and business leaders. Several school jurisdictions have developed their own principal preparation programs to fill this void. These programs tend to be short term and are targeted specifically to the school jurisdiction's needs.

The Commission believes that the role of principals is so important to the future of our schools that a specific training program should be designed and implemented. Principals and superintendents should be actively involved in designing the program. It should result in a professional certification for principals. The program should prepare principals to be learning leaders in their schools and to handle the diverse responsibilities that extend beyond the purely educational function. The program should be offered on a flexible basis so that current and prospective principals are able to take courses online, on weekends or in the summer months.

All prospective and new principals should be required to take the new program before becoming a principal or in their first few years of being assigned as a principal or an assistant principal. Current principals should be encouraged to take the program to enhance their skills. Salaries for principals should reflect their completion of this program.

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97 Collins (2001, p. 39).

78. Establish a new Council of Education Executives to provide certification, ongoing support and professional development for principals and assistant principals.

In view of their changing role, there have been debates about whether principals should continue to be included in the Alberta Teachers' Association. There are strong arguments for and against leaving principals in the ATA.

On the one hand, those who argue that principals should remain in the ATA suggest that:

- It enables principals to act as educational leaders and reinforces their leadership role in a professional learning community.
- Principals are better able to maintain a collegial atmosphere.
- The experience in BC has not been viewed positively - taking principals out of the teaching association has had a negative impact on principals' relationship with teachers.
- It provides a "moderating" impact on the ATA.
- When strikes occur and then are resolved, principals can more easily rebuild school morale.
- Schools are "different" working environments than other business or public sector organizations.

On the other hand, those who argue that principals should be taken out of the ATA suggest that:

- Principals have extensive management responsibilities.
- Collegiality - which is critically important in a school - is a management style not a structure. Many businesses and public sector organizations operate in a collegial manner while their managers are not part of the union.
- More recent experience in Ontario suggests that there is strong support among principals for the Ontario Principals' Council. A year after the Council was in place, 65% of principals and vice principals said they would not support returning to the Ontario Teachers' Federation.
- Given the emphasis on supporting teachers and teaching, it is difficult for the ATA to effectively represent principals or provide adequate professional development. Principals would receive more support through a separate "council of principals."
- Evaluating and disciplining teachers can put principals in a potential conflict of interest when they are members of the same association. Taking principals out removes the ambiguity for them. They know what their role is and where they stand. This is especially true in times of labour strife where they are often perceived as being in a conflicting role.
- There's an inconsistency between the role of principals (to protect students and create a positive environment with the best teachers) and the role of the association (to protect the interests of all members).

The question is a difficult one that gives rise to intense debates. The Commission struggled to find the best approach. On balance, our view is that the role of the principal is so important to the future of Alberta's schools that they need a separate professional organization specifically dedicated to maintaining, supporting and enhancing their leadership role in Alberta's schools. We believe that the end result will be better for students because their schools will be led by highly skilled school leaders who are well trained and fully prepared for the complex challenges they face.

We are persuaded by the view that principals would continue to operate in a collegial way regardless of whether or not they are in the ATA. This definitely is the case in many other organizations. Their role is certainly one of learning leader, but it is much more than that. Principals need not only to be outstanding teachers with a deep understanding of the teaching and learning process. They also need strong leadership and management skills to lead professional learning communities, motivate all employees in their schools, assess their teachers' performance, hire staff, work with students and their parents, participate in the development of school board policies, and manage substantial budgets.

Establishing a separate Council of Education Executives should be seen as a positive step for principals and assistant principals. It is not intended in any way as an action against the Alberta Teachers' Association and its role in providing professional support for principals. Instead, it is intended as a clear step to a future reality where the role of principals will continue to grow and change. A Council of Education Executives will ensure that:

- Ongoing professional development is available for principals and vice principals
- Principals have a trusted source of advice on handling a range of issues from supervising and evaluating teachers to communicating with parents, developing school improvement plans, addressing management challenges, and handling public relations.

The proposed Council of Education Executives would set standards for certifying principals and vice principals and provide professional development and support on an ongoing basis. It would not be involved in contract negotiations for principals and other executive officers, nor would it be involved in their discipline, hiring or firing. These matters would be strictly between school boards and principals and assistant principals.

The Commission understands that this is a major step that will undoubtedly be controversial. To make sure it works and works well, it has to be done right. In fact, there is a very clear risk that if it is not done right it could damage the current positive relationships that exist between principals and teachers. That means taking time to put the essential components in place but, at the same time, moving expeditiously so that principals are not left in limbo for an extended period of time.

The role of principals is so important to the future of Alberta's schools that they need a seperate professional organization specifically dedicated to maintaining, supporting and enhancing their leadership role.

For these reasons, the Commission feels strongly that principals should not be taken out of the ATA until and unless the following critical prerequisites are in place:

- School boards have plans to integrate principals into the management team
- A framework is in place for principals and their respective school boards to determine the terms and conditions of employment contracts between them
- A new Council of Education Executives is established with membership, functions, and plans in place
- Any necessary amendments to the Teaching Profession Act are made so that principals and assistant principals can remain as associate members of the ATA and continue to be able to teach in Alberta schools
- Plans are in place to allow principals and assistant principals to resume full membership in the ATA without penalty if they return to full-time teaching.

The Commission believes that the proposed new Council of Education Executives has the potential to become an outstanding professional leadership organization. The provincial government should take the lead in facilitating the establishment of the Council in cooperation with the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and a representative group of principals. A close working relationship between the Council and the College of Alberta School Superintendents should be established and expanded over time.

Develop outstanding superintendents

79. Develop a comprehensive, targeted program for preparing superintendents and providing ongoing professional development to support them in their role as CEOs of school jurisdictions.

If principals are the learning leaders of their schools, superintendents are the learning leaders for school jurisdictions. Superintendents and assistant superintendents must be able to handle complex and rapidly changing environments in order to provide clear leadership and implement educational reforms and innovations on an ongoing basis. Working with their boards, their staff, their principals and teachers, and Alberta Learning, superintendents are responsible for harnessing and allocating resources, establishing policies, setting direction, and ensuring sustained improvements in students' achievements. On top of their educational leadership roles, they are expected to be leaders in labour relations, human resources, policy development, strategic planning, employee supervision, and a wide range of management responsibilities. It is no easy job!

While some have suggested that superintendents do not need to be certified teachers in order to perform this complex role, the Commission disagrees. In order to provide the kind of ongoing professional leadership that is required, superintendents in Alberta should continue to be both excellent learning leaders and excellent executives.

Most superintendents are appointed from the ranks of successful principals. The current legislation requires that they have a Masters degree. In addition to this requirement, the Commission recommends that a targeted program be developed for preparing superintendents. The program should be delivered on an inservice and distance learning basis so that superintendents have the opportunity to develop their skills in real situations and be examined by their peers and experts.

80. Remove the current requirement for the appointment of superintendents to be approved by the Minister of Learning.

The Commission believes that a superintendent is the chief executive officer of a school jurisdiction. The school board should be completely responsible for selecting and appointing its superintendent and regularly evaluating his or her performance. While superintendents would continue to play an important role in working with Alberta Learning, fulfilling their legislated responsibilities, and participating in the development of provincial policies, they should be accountable to their school boards.

Good governance

Making sure children come to school ready to learn, meeting their unique needs and challenges, providing a world-class curriculum taught by dedicated and capable teachers ... all of these are key ingredients to help achieve our vision.

Behind the scenes, strong leadership combined with responsible and accountable governance is also critical to maintain capable stewardship of Alberta's education system.

Alberta has a long tradition of provincial and local leadership in education. At the provincial level, that leadership has translated into leading-edge curriculum, a well-respected provincial testing program, and strong support for ongoing innovation. At the local level, school boards have responded to the needs and expectations of their communities, maintained excellent schools, hired capable and caring teachers, and ensured good results for their students.

For the most part, the key stakeholders in education have enjoyed a cooperative relationship, working together on a number of important policy areas and providing sound direction for the education system as a whole. However, the relationship has not been without its rocky moments. At times, strong disagreements among the various partners have had a negative impact and have undermined confidence that the key partners in education 'have their act together.'

In 2001-02, labour unrest among Alberta's teachers, school boards, and the provincial government brought the importance of leadership and a number of related governance issues into sharp focus. Unfortunately, parents and students were caught in the middle, wanting nothing but a quick resolution and seeing little but intransigence from the key parties to the dispute. While it is not the Commission's job to assign blame, it is fair to say that there is ample blame to be shared by all parties.

Compared with some provinces, Alberta has enjoyed an environment of reasonably positive labour relations between teachers and school boards. A strike of the magnitude we saw in 2002 had never happened in Alberta's history and, while labour negotiations are bound to result in sometimes acrimonious debates and discussions, most often those hard feelings slip into the background when agreements are signed and people get back to the day-to-day work of educating children. 2002 was different. And the effect lingers on.

Unfortunately, much like Humpty Dumpty, nothing the Commission can recommend will put things back to the way they used to be. The unprecedented strike involving the majority of school jurisdictions across the province has changed the labour relations environment and there is little chance of going back. The dispute has left serious rifts between the parties that have not been resolved in more than a year since the strike was settled. While the province is not and does not want to be directly involved in contract negotiations, the fact that it provides the vast majority of funding for school boards means that it is like a silent partner at the bargaining table. School boards argue that, without access to any additional sources of revenue, their hands are tied and they can only bargain within the limits of what the province provides. The Alberta Teachers' Association and its members took their dispute beyond their employers, bargaining not only for higher salaries but for major infusions of provincial funding to improve classroom conditions and reduce class sizes. They saw their high hopes result in higher salaries but little else. In fact, as we prepare this report, the situation for students appears to be worse as school boards face the challenge of accommodating higher salaries without corresponding increases in funding from the province.

The Commission feels strongly that this experience must not be repeated. The goal must be nothing short of sustained and continuing labour peace.

The package of recommendations developed by the Commission is designed to strike a new balance - to balance the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties and to create a new approach to collective bargaining in the province. The proposed solutions are not extreme nor are they intended to be punitive. They simply are designed to put the collective bargaining process on a more positive track for the future. They will work and work well if the parties involved are willing to make them work. If not - if the same situation repeats itself or if the parties involved drag their feet and are unable or unwilling to implement the proposed changes - then there is a distinct possibility that extreme and unwanted changes could be implemented.

Needless to say, the Commission urges the parties involved to work together openly, cooperatively, and positively to close the door on the negative experiences of 2002 and open a new door to a fresh approach to collective bargaining.

While much of the focus has been on the labour situation, there are a number of important issues that impact how Alberta's education system is governed and managed. The Commission's recommendations on issues such as clarifying roles and responsibilities and reinforcing the role of school councils are designed to ensure that strong and capable leadership continues to be a hallmark of Alberta's education system.

Goals

- **Stable labour relations allow school boards, superintendents, principals and teachers to focus on students and achieving excellence.**
- **All components of the education system are efficiently and effectively managed and governed in an open and accountable way.**
- **The key partners in the education system - parents, students, teachers, superintendents, school trustees, and the provincial government - work together in a positive and collaborative way to achieve the best outcomes.**

Recommendations

Establish a new collective bargaining model

81. Create a new approach to collective bargaining with four key components:

- **Establishing a legislated employer bargaining association**
- **Maintaining the ATA as a single organization responsible for professional services and collective bargaining for teachers**
- **Limiting what can be bargained for collectively**
- **Expanding teachers' professional responsibilities but maintaining their right to strike.**

Establish a legislated employer bargaining association to negotiate collective agreements with the ATA.

Under the current arrangements, the Alberta Teachers' Association has a mandate to act as the bargaining agent for teachers employed by public, separate and francophone school jurisdictions. Traditionally, negotiations have taken place at the local level between ATA local organizations and individual school boards. The provincial organization has acted as the bargaining agent when local negotiations have broken down. At the same time, the provincial organization holds the bargaining certificate and must approve local agreements before they can be ratified.

The situation in 2002 was unique in that the ATA took a much more prominent role in a concerted province-wide approach which, in effect, bypassed local school boards and targeted the provincial government.

In contrast, school boards do not have an effective mechanism for providing a unified bargaining approach. While efforts are made through the Alberta School Boards Association to develop common strategies, provide negotiating advice, and take a consistent approach, there is no ability to bind locally elected school boards to a single, common bargaining strategy. In fact, the Commission heard that some school boards take pride in "going their own way" when it comes to bargaining with their local teachers.

The result is an imbalance in bargaining power between a strong and effective ATA on the one hand and a loose collection of school boards on the other.

A number of options have been suggested and considered by the Commission.

The ATA's preference is to leave the status quo in place. They argue that 2002 was an aberration and does not provide sufficient reason for making major changes to the collective bargaining process.

The Alberta School Boards Association prefers to reinforce local bargaining by removing the right of the ATA's provincial organization to approve or disapprove local agreements.

Some have suggested that, since the province holds all the purse strings, it should bargain with Alberta's teachers directly on a province-wide basis.

The Commission disagrees with each of these options. Firstly, the status quo is not an option. As noted earlier, the Commission believes it is highly unlikely that the labour relations environment will return to the way it was before the strike occurred. Furthermore, the Commission heard from some industry experts that there was an imbalance in collective bargaining power prior to the strike. In terms of moving to local bargaining, the Commission believes that local bargaining has considerable merit. However, the fact that salary settlements in one jurisdiction quickly become

the standard for other jurisdictions means that a loose form of province-wide bargaining already is in place. Finally, there are strong arguments in favour of province-wide bargaining, but the Commission believes this would seriously undermine the role of school boards. It would end any kind of local control and local bargaining. And it would bring the province front and centre into regular disputes with teachers.

On balance, then, a new approach is needed. There are some alternative models that provide some useful insights.

- In Alberta's health system, regional health authorities voluntarily work together to bargain with nurses and other unions. While this is not a legislated arrangement, health authorities have been able to maintain a united approach in bargaining with unions.
- In Saskatchewan, the Education Act requires the School Trustees Association to appoint members to a joint employer/government bargaining team to negotiate a provincial agreement with teachers. The School Trustees Association coordinates bargaining for school boards. Their system has a combination of province-wide and local bargaining. Issues such as salaries and benefits are bargained province-wide while local bargaining involves issues such as sabbatical leaves, educational leaves, pay periods for teachers, and special allowances.
- British Columbia's Public Service Employers Act requires all public sector boards (including health and education boards) to belong to an employer association. The BC Public School Employers Organization appoints members to a joint employer/government bargaining team to conduct province-wide bargaining with the teachers' association. The BC model also involves a combination of province-wide and local bargaining.
- In Alberta's construction industry, special rules have been set in the Labour Relations Code. A group of employers can form an employers' organization and apply to the Labour Relations Board for a registration certificate to obtain the exclusive right to bargain on behalf of all unionized employers for a particular construction trade and sector. Registration of an employer organization occurs if the majority of eligible employers support it, just like the requirements for unions to become certified to represent a group of employees.

The Commission believes there is considerable merit in strengthening the ability of school boards to bargain with teachers as a group on a province-wide basis and to match the mandate of the ATA. For this reason, the Commission recommends that an employers' bargaining organization be established. The organization could be under the umbrella of the Alberta School Boards Association or it could be a separate organization established for bargaining purposes only. The organization would be:

- Established under the Labour Relations Code and mandatory for all school boards to belong. While a voluntary arrangement might be preferable, it seems unlikely that 62 school boards would be able to voluntarily maintain a united front.
- Given the exclusive right to represent school boards in bargaining certain items such as salaries and benefits for teachers on a province-wide basis. Local bargaining would continue for working conditions that are primarily local in nature.
- Limited to collective bargaining with teachers. The Commission assumes that school boards would continue to bargain locally with other employees.

There are clear benefits to this approach. It would provide:

- An efficient mechanism, reducing the need for extensive duplication in bargaining efforts across the province.
- A collective voice for school boards and require them to develop a common front on key bargaining issues.
- A measure of consistency in salaries and benefits but also provide ample opportunity for local issues and needs to be addressed through local bargaining. (Currently there are wide variations in collective agreements particularly in the area of benefits. In some cases, school boards pay benefits that significantly exceed industry standards.)
- Clear responsibility for collective bargaining in the hands of those who are most directly affected, namely teachers and school boards, rather than involving the provincial government.
- A level playing field for employers and teachers in the education system.

Within this overall direction, the Commission recommends that the provincial government, the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta Teachers' Association work together to determine the parameters for this new approach including deciding what matters would be bargained provincially versus locally and how the process would work in terms of actual negotiations, dispute resolution, and signing of agreements. School boards would be responsible for determining how the employers' organization would be constituted, how representation would be determined, and how collective bargaining mandates would be set and approved by members of the organization.

Given the urgency of putting this new approach in place, the Commission strongly urges the parties involved to take action and ensure that appropriate legislation is in place within the next twelve months.

Maintain a single Alberta Teachers' Association with responsibilities for both professional development and collective bargaining.

Among professions that bargain collectively with employers, the combined model of the ATA is quite unique. Doctors, nurses, and pharmacists all have separate organizations to handle professional responsibilities and matters related to collective bargaining and working conditions. Across the country, provinces such as British Columbia and Ontario have separate organizations for professional and union-related responsibilities of teachers.

Following the labour dispute in 2002, there has been renewed discussion about splitting the ATA into two organizations - one for professional responsibilities and one for collective bargaining. On the one hand, this is consistent with the model used for other professions. It addresses concerns that a single organization cannot adequately address both aspects and, as a result, professional development activities take a back seat to union-related matters. On the other hand, arguments have been made that maintaining both functions in a single organization provides a good balance between professional and union-related functions.

The Commission's view is that, while a case can be made for splitting the association based on successful models for other professions, on balance, there are not sufficient reasons for recommending that the organization be split.

As noted earlier in this report, the Commission recommends that a separate professional organization be established for principals, although principals should continue to have associate membership in the ATA. We also recommend that certificated central office staff who are not included in the collective agreement should not be required to be members of the ATA but should have the option of associate membership as is the case for the chief superintendent and the deputy chief superintendent.

Put limits on what items can be included in collective agreements.

Over the years, teachers and school boards have negotiated agreements that address a number of items in addition to salaries and benefits including the number of hours a teacher can work, class sizes, and pupil-teacher ratios. With the Education Services Settlement Act, collective agreements that are negotiated while the Act is in place are not allowed to include class sizes, hours of instruction or pupil-teacher ratios.

The Commission understands that there is a fine line between what could be termed teachers' working conditions and what are critical responsibilities for school boards to allow them to manage schools effectively. As noted earlier, the Commission recommends that province-wide guidelines be set for average class sizes. With these province-wide guidelines in place, the Commission believes there no longer is a need for teachers to bargain collectively for reduced class sizes. Therefore, class sizes should continue to be excluded from collective agreements. As noted earlier, the Commission recommends that pupil-teacher ratios no longer be used as a measure in Alberta's school system.

In terms of hours of instruction, there is a distinction between the number of hours of instruction students should receive and the number of hours individual teachers should be required to spend working directly with students in the classroom. School boards must ensure that the legislated number of hours of instruction is available for students. On the other hand, there should be some flexibility in the amount of time individual teachers are required to spend in the classroom in order to accommodate different programs and organizational structures and to address local circumstances.

This is a complex issue. Only a portion of teachers' working time is spent actually teaching students. In addition, they spend time preparing lessons and marking assignments, communicating with parents, supervising students, working with individual students, participating in professional development, organizing follow-up with students and extracurricular activities, as well as working with fellow teachers as part of a professional learning community. All of these activities take time.

The Commission was unable to recommend appropriate guidelines for teaching time, given the complexity and the number of factors involved. On balance, the Commission feels that the number of hours teachers spend in the classroom should not be included in collective agreements. The preferred approach is to allow more flexibility for school boards, teachers, and principals to work out acceptable arrangements rather than establishing hard and fast rules in collective agreements.

Expand teachers' professional responsibilities but maintain their right to strike.

The Commission heard strong arguments in favour of removing teachers' right to strike and their right to withdraw services, particularly professional services related to marking provincial exams and extracurricular activities. During the 2002 strike, perhaps nothing was a more serious concern to parents and students than the disruption caused by teachers' withdrawal from all extracurricular activities and the ATA's position that teachers should refuse to mark grade 12 diploma exams.

Certainly arguments can be made that education is an essential service. It is difficult to argue, on the one hand, that education is vitally important to the future of Alberta's children and, on the other hand, suggest that closing down schools is justifiable. Teachers' right to strike has to be balanced against students' right to learn.

At the same time, the Commission's view is that the right to strike is fundamental and should be removed only in exceptional cases. Most health care providers as well as all firefighters and police do not have the right to strike because they are considered essential services. A clear case can be made that, if these people withdrew their services, the result would be serious threats to individuals' lives, their health and their security.

In education, the case is not nearly as clear. Certainly, there are negative consequences if children are out of school for extended periods of time. But the consequences are not irreparable. Students may not be able to attend school, but they can continue to learn outside of the classroom setting. Extra efforts can be made by teachers and students to catch up once a strike is over. The fact that there are serious consequences to strikes and considerable public attention also puts added pressure on the parties involved to come to a quick resolution of the dispute.

On balance, then, the Commission recommends that teachers retain their right to strike, but we strongly encourage them and their employers to search for better solutions that keep children in school.

In terms of withdrawal of extracurricular activities and other services, many of these are provided on a voluntary basis although they have long been regarded as an essential part of what teachers do. Many of the services teachers provide outside the classroom are vitally important to their students, their school, and the teachers themselves. In some cases, teachers are given additional time during the day to compensate for the hours they spend after school and on weekends.

The Commission believes that a teacher's professional responsibilities should include not only teaching in the classroom but also participating in activities that benefit the school system as a whole and the teaching profession. This would include:

- Participating in curriculum development and field testing new curriculum
- Developing, field testing, and marking provincial achievement tests and diploma examinations
- Supervising student teachers.

Currently, these three areas are optional for teachers, although many participate in these activities on an ongoing basis, and they are paid extra for some of these services. While individual teachers cannot be required to mark exams, get involved in curriculum development or supervise student teachers, making these responsibilities part of a teacher's professional responsibilities means that the Alberta Teachers' Association, locally or provincially, cannot recommend that teachers withdraw these services. In the event that sufficient teachers do not offer their services, particularly to mark exams, superintendents would be expected to ensure that teachers are available to provide these essential services.

Extracurricular activities are more difficult to address. While parents and students see these activities as an essential part of their school experience, teachers contend that these activities are strictly voluntary. Individual teachers make choices about whether or not they get involved in extracurricular activities although it's fair to say that many, if not most, of them do. Some suggest that, if extracurricular activities are assigned by the principal, they could legally be considered part of a teacher's responsibilities.

Although there clearly are debates on this issue, the Commission does not believe that extracurricular activities should be designated as part of teachers' professional responsibilities nor do we believe they should be paid extra for these tasks. In many cases, schools engage volunteers from the community to coach sports teams or work with students on other extracurricular activities. This is a positive way of actively engaging community members in schools and making this part of a teacher's responsibilities could exclude others from playing this role.

The result is that teachers can, if they choose, threaten to or actually withdraw extracurricular activities in times of labour strife. However, the Commission strongly opposes this tactic as do the majority of parents and students in the province. We share the view of many parents and students that withdrawing extracurricular services is a very negative tactic that is ultimately harmful to children. It directly and negatively impacts the very people teachers most want to have on their side, namely, their students and parents and, in many respects, it simply holds them to ransom, caught in the middle of a dispute they neither caused nor can resolve.

Balance roles and responsibilities

82. Maintain a balance between centralized and decentralized responsibilities for the provincial government and school boards.

Alberta's education system is a balance - a balance between provincial responsibilities and directions, local school board autonomy, and considerable flexibility for individual schools and communities.

Clearly, the provincial government has an important role to play in:

- Setting overall goals and direction
- Establishing provincial curriculum
- Developing and administering province-wide achievement tests and diploma exams
- Certifying teachers
- Allocating resources
- Measuring and reporting on performance.

The result is that teachers can, if they choose, threaten to or actually withdraw extracurricular activities in times of labour strife. However, the Commission strongly opposes this tactic as do the majority of parents and students in the province.

Within the overall direction set by the provincial government, school jurisdictions are primarily responsibile for education 'on the ground' - delivering services to students, hiring and evaluating teachers and principals, measuring and reporting on results, and working with parents and community members.

This balanced approach to governance has served the province well. It produces a kind of dynamic tension that allows the different partners to work together, push and prod, agree and disagree, and in the end, ensure the best results for Alberta's students.

It's important for this balance to be maintained and strengthened. There is a perception that the province is moving towards more centralized control of the education system. Concerns have been expressed about the lack of consultation on major policy directions or reduced involvement in areas such as curriculum development. The current funding framework provides provincial funding in distinct envelopes and this limits school boards' abilities to allocate funds as necessary to meet local priorities and needs. Some of these concerns may be more perceived than real.

The Commission feels that the best approach involves strong provincial leadership combined with maximum flexibility for school jurisdictions and individual schools to meet the needs of their students. Appropriate accountability must be in place at all levels so that parents, students and community members are well informed about what is being achieved in their schools.

Explore opportunities for amalgamating services and streamlining administration

83. Provide provincial incentives and support to school jurisdictions that wish to consider joint services and amalgamations in order to improve services to their students.

In 1995, the province took steps to cut the number of school boards in half, moving from 146 to 66 boards. At the time, a guideline of 3,500 - 4,000 students was considered. Even with the amalgamations, there currently are 34 school jurisdictions that serve fewer than 5,000 students. In some cases, urban school jurisdictions are almost completely surrounded by smaller school jurisdictions even though they are part of the same commercial and business area.

For our current population of just over three million people, Alberta currently has 41 public boards, 16 separate boards, and five francophone boards (for a total of 62 boards) in addition to boards for charter schools. In comparison:

- British Columbia with a population of over four million people has 60 school boards
- Ontario has a population of over 12 million and has 72 district school boards
- Quebec has close to 7.5 million people served by 69 school boards.

Over the years, all provinces in Canada and many US states have gone through times when the number of school boards has been reduced through either forced or voluntary amalgamations. The reasons for reducing the number of school boards are many and varied but traditionally include:

- Achieving cost savings or providing a larger base of revenues by combining smaller jurisdictions
- Reducing administration
- Improving educational opportunity and quality of education

- Improving equity
- Improving efficiency and accountability
- Providing a stronger role for parents through parent councils with expanded roles and responsibilities.

Experience from amalgamation of major private sector organizations and the recent amalgamation of school districts in Ontario suggests that, for amalgamation to be successful, a number of important factors must be in place including:

- A clear vision of why the amalgamation is being done, capable leadership and due diligence in advance of the amalgamation
- Cultural compatibility among the organizations being merged
- Full-scale stakeholder involvement
- A clear and continuing focus on what needs to be done throughout the amalgamation process.[98]

While there is no clear research on an optimal size of school boards, a review of boundaries in Manitoba concluded 5,000 to 35,000 or even 50,000 students would be within an optimal range. Research from British Columbia suggests that savings may occur by restructuring districts with fewer than 5,000 students and that there are few, if any, savings involved in combining larger school jurisdictions.[99]

In Alberta's case, the savings involved in the last amalgamation were not significant but there were benefits in terms of the range of services that could be provided for students.

In terms of looking at further amalgamations, the Commission does not suggest that school boards should be amalgamated in order to save money. There may be some savings, but they would be small in comparison with the overall budget for the province's education system. There are, however, good reasons for looking at potential economies of scale.

Smaller school jurisdictions have limited funds and struggle to provide their students with access to a basic education program let alone a range of options and supports. Even with additional funds provided by the province to compensate for their 'smallness' they often find it difficult to attract teachers, provide counselling services, or maintain a full range of learning resources. As part of a larger and more viable region, there would be greater opportunities to share resources, provide options such as traveling counsellors and other specialists, and provide students with access to the range of opportunities they want and expect. With expansions in technology, collaborative arrangements among school jurisdictions are more viable, particularly in the area of sharing specialized services and administrative functions. At the same time, there are downsides to amalgamating districts including increased distances for administration and loss of local control.

The Commission recommends that the provincial government provide incentives and support pilot projects for school jurisdictions that are interested in considering joint services or exploring potential amalgamations. Pilot projects involving willing partners would allow school jurisdictions to explore the various options, work out the barriers and assess the benefits in advance.

The Commission understands that separate and francophone school boards have certain rights under the Constitution. At the same time, smaller francophone and separate school boards could also choose to explore pilot projects and consider potential amalgamations in order to enhance the services they can provide to their students.

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[98] Williams (2003, pp. 22 - 23). [99] Fleming (1997).

Active, daily engagement in their children's learning is the most important role parents can play in supporting their children and their schools.

84. Develop common technology standards for financial and accounting, student information, human resources and other key information systems to improve the administration of education.

Technology has clear benefits in the classroom but it also can be used to improve the administration of education, save money for school jurisdictions and ensure comparable information. Currently, many school jurisdictions independently assess and purchase information systems, particularly in the financial and human resources areas. Some school jurisdictions have made significant investments in information systems. With province-wide standards in place, smaller school jurisdictions could invest in common systems.

In addition, technology can also be used to reduce costs and improve efficiency in administration. With videoconferencing and data conferencing, travel times and costs can be reduced, particularly in rural areas. Instead of meeting face to face, regular meetings, administrative functions, and business decisions can be facilitated with the use of technology.

Build effective and engaged school councils

85. Reinforce the role of school councils and require principals to actively engage parents in school improvement planning.

The Commission's vision highlights the critical role parents play in the education of their children. They are their children's first teachers and research consistently shows that the outcomes for children are improved when parents play an active role in their education. As Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning noted, "Nothing motivates a child more than a home where learning is valued. If parents show a close interest in their children's progress, help with homework and home projects, and attend their kids' various school performances and sports events, their kids are more likely to have higher student achievement, higher aspirations, better attendance, and a more positive relationship with their teachers."[100]

Active, daily engagement in their children's learning is the most important role parents can play in supporting their children and their schools. With effective professional learning communities in place in every school, parents should be actively involved as partners in improving their own children's achievement and the overall achievement of students in the school. For many busy and active parents, this is likely the most support they are able to provide while others choose to become more directly involved through vehicles such as school councils.

School councils are one way of involving parents and community members in the overall direction of schools. All schools in Alberta are required to have a school council. Unfortunately, the experience with school councils is mixed. In many cases, they play a strong and vibrant role, working with the principal to create a positive learning environment and to provide input and advice on a wide range of issues. In other cases, their role is more limited to special events or fund-raising. In spite of efforts to involve community members, not just parents, it's fair to say that very few community members choose to become or stay involved in schools once their children have left school.

The Commission feels strongly that school councils can and should play an active and vigorous role in each and every school. They can provide an important vehicle for engaging parents, along with principals and teachers, in exploring ways of continuously improving outcomes for students through school improvement planning. Principals should be required to involve school councils in the development of annual school improvement

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[100] Ontario Royal Commission on Learning (1994, p. 49).

plans. School councils can be part of the process for reviewing and assessing the outcomes of province-wide achievement testing and diploma exams. They can provide a strong link between parents and the school and advocate on behalf of parents who may not be directly involved in school councils. Because of the important role principals play in schools, the Commission also believes that school councils can play a role in setting criteria and identifying the skills required of principals in their schools to guide selection processes.

86. Clearly define and set province-wide policy on what is considered "basic" and what are considered "extras" in relation to fund-raising by school councils. Limit school councils' role in fund-raising to "extras" consistently defined across the province and require schools and school councils to report annually on their fund-raising activities and how the funds were used.

Like many parents, the Commission is concerned that the role of school councils in fund-raising has gone too far. Although current policy is supposed to prevent school councils from fund-raising for anything except extras like field trips or special events, in reality, there is a significant amount of fund-raising going on in schools across the province, some of which is likely initiated by school councils themselves.

The Commission also heard about wide variations in what is termed "basic" and what is included as "extras." In some cases, library resources are considered basics and therefore, fund-raising by school councils is not allowed. In other cases, school councils raise funds and contribute significant resources to libraries. The inconsistencies also apply to technology, computer equipment and school playgrounds. In the case of playgrounds, in some communities funding is provided by community leagues and provincial grants while in others, parents are completely responsible for raising the necessary funds.

The Commission is reluctant to exclude fund-raising altogether. There are a number of special events and extracurricular activities that add value to students' experiences at school but clearly go well beyond what should be required as part of the core curriculum. Preventing fund-raising entirely would result in many of these special events and activities being completely eliminated or the burden being shifted entirely to individual students and their parents, many of whom could not afford the extra costs. We don't want students to lose out on experiences that add richness to their overall school experience.

On the other hand, the Commission heard from school councils that said their primary role had become one of raising additional funding. Clearly this is not the intent of having school councils.

The Commission therefore recommends that the Minister of Learning work with school jurisdictions and representatives of school councils to establish a province-wide fund-raising policy. The policy should clearly define the distinction between basics and extras and ensure consistency in application across the province. The role of school councils in fund-raising should be strictly limited to "extras." To underscore the importance of this limitation, school councils and schools should be required to report annually on how much money was raised, what the purpose of the fund-raising was, and how the funds were ultimately used. In this way, school jurisdictions and the provincial government should be able to monitor and limit the extent of fund-raising activities across the province.

Investing in our children's future

> *"Investing in education is an investment in the future. It ensures that our children will have opportunities and choices. It develops good thinkers, good problem-solvers, and good citizens who will have the skills to build a strong economy and a prosperous, democratic society."*
>
> **Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 25)**

Turning the Commission's vision - and the vision of all Albertans - into a reality where every child learns and every child succeeds requires not only the concerted actions outlined in the Commission's recommendations but also a significant financial investment in the future of Alberta's children.

Funding of Alberta's education system was clearly and consistently raised throughout the Commission's consultations. Since the mid-1990s, the province has increased funding for schools. And yet, the demands on schools, the diversity of children in the classroom, and continuing expectations that Alberta's children receive the best education we can provide, mean there are very real signs that the system is being stretched to the limit.

The Commission consistently heard there is no better investment than an investment in our children. Well-educated children, children who come to school ready to learn, are more likely to be healthy and to live productive and positive lives. They're more likely to get well-paying jobs and to be contributing members of our communities. They're also more likely to provide the high quality skills our economy needs, especially as we look to a future where ideas and innovation will be critical.

The Commission has carefully examined three key areas:

- **The adequacy of current funding** - There is little point in simply adding resources for new initiatives if the current base of funding is not sufficient to meet current needs and expectations. In assessing the adequacy of current funding, the Commission also reviewed the Renewed Funding Framework developed by a team of representatives from the education system under the leadership of Alberta Learning.
- **The cost of new initiatives recommended by the Commission** - Much can be done within existing resources in schools. Every new idea does not require new resources. But a number of the initiatives recommended by the Commission are significant and will require additional resources to implement.
- **Potential sources of revenue** - While the vast majority of funds should continue to come from the provincial government, options for additional sources of revenues should also be explored. Currently, funds for education come primarily from two sources - the general revenues of the province (64%) and education property taxes (36%) collected across the province and redistributed on an equitable basis.

In addition, throughout our report, a number of recommendations are made for improving accountability by requiring the provincial government, school boards, and schools to report regularly and consistently on a series of important measures. We cannot expect to invest a significant proportion of taxpayers' dollars into our education system and not, at the same time, require full, accurate and consistent reporting on how those resources are being used to achieve the best results for Alberta's children.

Provide adequate funding for the current education system

Trying to sort out current funding for school boards is like walking through a maze. Numbers provided by various organizations and the province are not consistent. They are not based on similar assumptions and timeframes. And there clearly is no agreement on whether funding is adequate, how much more might be needed, and where it should be spent.

The Commission looked at a number of Alberta studies on funding and found serious flaws in how funding had been assessed and how various factors were or were not accounted for in the methods used by the researchers. For that reason, the Commission did not accept the findings of these studies and had our own assessment done instead.

With the help of a team of financial advisors, the Commission assessed the available information about the adequacy of current funding. For the purposes of this assessment:

- Provincial funding amounts verified independently by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in January 2002 were accepted as accurate.
- 1995-96 was chosen as the base year for comparison purposes. Many have argued that assessing the adequacy of current funding should go back to the late 1980s before reductions were made in education funding as part of the province's overall balanced budget plans. However, fundamental changes were made in education funding immediately prior to 1995-96 and this makes comparisons before that time difficult and tenuous. Most importantly, the province took over full funding of school boards, collecting all education property taxes and reallocating them to school boards. While starting with 1995-96 may not give a full historic picture, we can at least be assured that comparisons are based on the same basic funding model. We acknowledge that substantial funding reductions were made prior to 1995-96 including a 5% reduction in salaries and an overall reduction in education funding of 7.4% compared with substantially higher reductions in other government departments.[101]
- All operations and maintenance funding has been removed for the purposes of this analysis. Operations and maintenance funding used to be provided as part of Alberta Learning's budget but now is provided through Alberta Infrastructure. The issue of the adequacy of operations and maintenance funding is dealt with separately.
- Private school funding is not included in our analysis.
- Funding has been adjusted to reflect spending on a school year basis rather than for the province's fiscal year.

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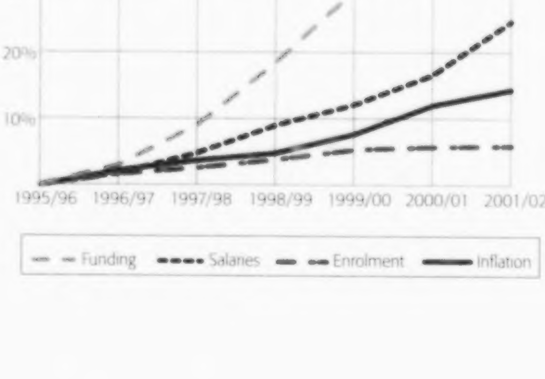
[101] Initial plans were for basic education funding to be reduced by 12.4% between 1992-93 and 1996-97. Actual reductions made between1993-94 and 1995-96 amounted to 7.4%. (Alberta Finance)

Based on this assessment, the Commission came to the following conclusions about the adequacy of current education funding.

Since 1995-96 when funding reductions in education were at their peak, overall funding for education has increased by 43.6% while inflation rose by 14.4% (using the Consumer Price Index). At the same time, the cost of salaries increased by 25.6% and the number of students in schools increased by 6.6%. The number of teachers increased from 27,179 in 1995-96 to 29,853 in 2001-02, an increase of just under 10%.

In terms of the financial situation for school boards, as of August 2002, there was a combined total of over $170 million in accumulated operating reserves in school jurisdictions. For 2003, the forecast is that 56 school boards will have either balanced budgets or accumulated operating reserves while six (including Edmonton and Calgary public school jurisdictions) will have accumulated operating deficits.


Investment in Basic Learning
1995-96 to 2001-02 School Year

Much of the recent discussion on the adequacy of current funding focuses on the ability of school boards to support the arbitrated settlement with teachers.

School boards argue that they were provided with targeted 6% increases to fund teachers' salaries over two years and were advised that other increases in instructional grants should be used to support enhancements in the education system. As a result, most school boards used increases in other aspects of provincial funding to reduce class sizes, hire more teachers, or improve programs. When they received a 14% arbitrated settlement, they only had the 6% designated funding available to pay for teachers' salary increases.

On the other hand, provincial government officials argue that school boards have sufficient resources to pay for the salary settlement. They indicate that school boards were not bound to use only the 6% for salary settlements. They estimate the costs of the arbitrated settlement and related benefits at $260 million. In the province's view, the increase in provincial funding for salary enhancement ($118 million) and increases in basic instruction grants ($180 million) provided school boards with more than enough to cover the arbitrated salary settlements.

The Commission's assessment is that the reality lies somewhere between the two positions. On the one hand, the designated funding for salary increases clearly was not sufficient to cover the costs of the arbitrated settlement as well as other salary and cost pressures. But on the other hand, school boards were not bound to use only the designated funds for salary settlements. The funding increases specifically designated for salary settlements covered about 45% of the costs of the arbitrated settlement. In terms of the additional increases in instructional grants provided by the provincial government, past

experience suggests that school boards would typically spend between 54% and 56% of this amount on teacher salaries and benefits, while the remainder would go to increases in salaries for non-certificated staff and other increases in the costs of programs and schools. If school boards had followed this same approach, they would have had sufficient funds to pay for the arbitrated settlement.

However, looking at the arbitrated settlement alone does not take into account the fact that school boards also had to pay for increasing salary costs for non-certificated staff as well as accommodating inflation over the 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years. Adding these cost pressures into the equation, the estimated shortfall in salary and other cost pressures is outlined below.

Based on this assessment, the Commission concludes that school boards face a shortfall of $19.8 million as a result of unfunded salary and cost pressures. The Commission acknowledges that this does not address the shortfall experienced by individual school boards that chose to spend only the 6% designated funds for teacher salary purposes.

In addition to salary costs, school boards also are faced with increasing costs for programs for children with special needs. Funding for children with severe disabilities has increased substantially, but school boards have argued that the funding they receive does not cover the full costs of providing programs for these children. Information provided to the Commission shows that there is a shortfall of approximately $23 million in the costs of these programs and services and the funding provided by the province.

> ***"There is a serious gap between what school boards receive to serve special needs students and the real costs of serving these students."***
>
> **Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 28)**

Amount available for teacher salary increases	
Cost of arbitrated settlement (including salaries and benefits)	$260 million
Total additional amount provided by the province (including 6% designated for salaries and increases in instructional grants)	$298 million
Remaining amount for other salaries and inflation	**$38 million**
Two-year increases in salaries for non-certificated staff (based on 5% and 4% awards similar to provincial government)	$37.8 million
Inflation estimated at 2% per year[102]	$20.0 million
Total	$57.8 million
Estimated shortfall ($57.8 million minus $38 million)	$19.8 million

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[102] The 2% allowance for cost increases in supplies and services is less than the rate of inflation as measured by the CPI, but the CPI increase includes cost increases due to wage inflation which have been accounted for separately. The increased costs of operations and maintenance are addressed separately as part of the Commission's overall assessment of the current shortfall in funds to school jurisdictions.

> ***"Proper funding for the ongoing maintenance of our schools is not a luxury. Simply put, it's prudent financial management."***
>
> **Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 30)**

Changes in how grade 10 students are funded were made in the 2002-03 school year in order to address concerns from the Auditor General about credit enrolment unit funding. In effect, the changes moved from providing funding on the basis of credit enrolment units to putting limits on the maximum number of credits that would be funded for full-time and part-time students. Reinstating credit enrolment funding for grade 10 students, with a cap on how many credits a student could acquire, would cost the province an additional $16.8 million.

Operations and maintenance funding is provided through Alberta Infrastructure. The Commission consistently heard that current funding for operating and maintaining schools is inadequate. The Commission agrees with an assessment done by the Plant Operations and Maintenance Stakeholder Committee, indicating that an additional $31 million is needed to provide adequate operations and maintenance funding to school boards. In June 2003, the provincial government provided an additional $30 million to school jurisdictions to address cost pressures for operations and maintenance, however, this funding was provided on a one-time basis only.

The Commission also reviewed key elements of the Renewed Funding Framework. Considerable work has gone into the development of the framework and various education stakeholders were involved in the process. The proposed new framework is intended to ensure equity, accountability and flexibility. The framework has some clear strengths in that it provides much more flexibility to school boards in how they allocate funds to meet local needs and circumstances and then holds them accountable for the decisions they make. The funding framework takes into account cost factors that differ among school boards and factors that are beyond their control. Funding would be based on jurisdiction profiles that provide a combination of formula-driven factors (such as enrolment) and weighted factors such as the number of children with special needs, ESL students, Aboriginal population, and socioeconomic status of people in the region served by the school board.

Estimates provided to the Commission indicate that it would cost an additional $46 million to implement this new funding framework, primarily so that no school board would receive less money under the new approach.

[illegible]	[illegible]
Current shortfall in funding:	
Unfunded salary and cost pressures	$19.8 million
Children with severe disabilities	$23.0 million
Operations and maintenance funding	$31.0 million
Grade 10 credit enrolment unit funding	$16.8 million
Total	$90.6 million
Implement new funding framework	$46.0 million
Total	$136.6 million

87. Address the current shortfall in funds as soon as possible, but no later than the 2004-05 provincial budget.

Based on our review, the Commission believes that there currently is a shortfall of just under $91 million. Recognizing that it is difficult to allocate additional funding outside of the regular budget process, the Commission urges the provincial government to address this shortfall as soon as possible, but definitely as part of its budget decisions for 2004-05.

88. Address the shortfall in operations and maintenance funding on an ongoing basis.

The additional funds provided by the provincial government in June 2003 will address the shortfall in operations and maintenance funding for this year. However, these costs are not one-time pressures that are likely to disappear after the current fiscal year. The additional funding provided this year should be built into the ongoing budgets for school jurisdictions. Also, as noted earlier in this report in relation to "The schools we need," the Commission recommends that responsibility for budgets for building and renovating schools as well as operations and maintenance be transferred to Alberta Learning so these items can be considered as an integral part of the costs of running an efficient and effective school system.

89. Implement the Renewed Funding Framework as part of the budget for 2004-05.

The Commission strongly endorses the approach taken in the proposed funding framework. It provides considerably more flexibility to school boards and, at the same time, recognizes a number of factors that affect the cost of providing education in different communities. It also reinforces the responsibility and accountability of school boards to make decisions about how best to allocate their resources to meet the needs of their students.

90. Provide sustainable and predictable funding.

Throughout its consultations, the Commission consistently heard a plea for stable, sustainable and predictable funding for education. Stable and predictable funding will allow schools and school boards to plan ahead and know how much funding they can count on to implement their plans and priorities. With the introduction of the new Alberta Sustainability Fund, the provincial government should be able to meet this expectation and provide a longer term commitment to stable and predictable funding.

91. Implement a transparent, open and understandable financial information system that provides accurate, timely and comparable information on funding for Alberta's education system.

The Commission was frustrated by the lack of consistent and comparable information on how much is spent in the education system and where the funds are spent. It was difficult to compare spending over time because the assumptions and variables included are not consistent. Albertans deserve good information on how their tax dollars are used to support the education system and where those dollars are spent. A new financial information system for all school jurisdictions that provides transparent, open and understandable information is critical.

92. Establish a mechanism for school boards and teachers to provide ongoing and regular input to the provincial government on the overall costs of education and related issues.

The Commission heard that both teachers and school boards feel powerless in dealing with the provincial government on the adequacy of funding. This was a particular concern leading up to the strike in 2002 but, on an ongoing basis, suggestions have been made that a more open and consistent process should be in place for stakeholders to discuss funding issues with the provincial government.

> *"... as payers of taxes and school-related fees, [parents] deserve straightforward, unbiased information from which to decide, for themselves, the adequacy of government funding and how wisely it is used."*
>
> **Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (2002, p. 9)**

The Alberta Financial Management Commission (2002) made two recommendations that are related to this concern:

- Standing Policy Committees should be given increased responsibility for gathering information from various stakeholder organizations and providing this input to the budgeting process.
- Government should play a more direct role in establishing a framework for public sector salary negotiations through a mechanism for sharing information with various employer groups including health authorities and school boards. This would include providing guidance on the province's ability to meet new fixed costs on a sustainable basis and on competitive salaries and benefit levels in other provinces and jurisdictions.[103]

The Commission supports these recommendations and urges the government to move ahead with establishing a clear mechanism for school boards and teachers to provide direct input into the annual budgeting process.

Support new initiatives

93. Phase-in funding for new initiatives recommended by the Commission on a priority basis over the next five years.

The Commission has prepared preliminary estimates of the costs of major new initiatives recommended in our report. The estimates are just that - our best estimates of what the costs might be. Further detailed work is required to refine these estimates.

The Commission also suggests that the major initiatives be implemented in two phases over the next five years. This is important for several reasons.

- The costs of implementing all of the initiatives at once would be prohibitively high.
- Careful planning is needed to ensure that the initiatives are successfully implemented.
- The education system could not accommodate all of the changes at once.

The Commission has not attempted to estimate potential costs for all of the ideas and initiatives included in our report. In our view, many of the initiatives can be implemented within the regular budgets of school jurisdictions and the provincial government. It may require shifting in priorities particularly in areas such as curriculum development. In other cases such as special education, the Commission has assumed that the suggested increases in funding for children with severe disabilities combined with the new funding formula and school jurisdiction profiles should help address concerns about the adequacy of funding. In terms of expanding access to counselling and other specialized services, the Commission acknowledges that additional costs are involved; however, it is difficult to estimate what the actual costs would be. School jurisdictions are encouraged to explore different models for delivering these services. With additional funding to address current shortfalls combined with new funding for recommended initiatives, there should be sufficient funds available for school boards to address these issues and expand access to these services.

While the costs for many of the initiatives recommended by the Commission are significant, they need to be placed in perspective. The province currently invests $3.8 billion in Alberta's education system. The new initiatives recommended by the Commission in phase one would increase that investment by just under 6%. Furthermore, the investment we make today in the education of our children will pay substantial dividends for generations of Albertans to come. Albertans have consistently said that education is one of their top priorities. For us to succeed in giving every child the chance to learn and succeed ... for us to have a highly skilled and well-educated workforce ... and for us to develop the kind of civil society Albertans want ... there is no better investment we can make than in education and the future of our children.

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[103] Alberta Financial Management Commission (2002, p. 12).

Phase one - Years 1 - 3

Priority initiative	Estimated annual incremental cost	Estimated one-time costs	Notes
Implement class size guidelines for kindergarten to grade 3	$111.4 million	$47 million	Includes an estimated $106.4 million for instructional costs and $5 million for operations and maintenance. One-time capital costs are estimates only and will depend on the number of additional classrooms required.
Establish parenting centres	$10.5 million		Based on funding 150 centres; 10 in each of Edmonton and Calgary; one in every city (two where there are public and separate school boards); and one in every town.
Implement full-day junior kindergarten programs for children at risk	$42.0 million	Capital costs not included	
Implement full-day regular kindergarten programs for children at risk	$21.0 million	Capital costs not included	
Expand implementation of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework and provide home liaison workers	$10.0 million for Policy Framework $7.3 million for home liaison workers	Initial training costs for home liaison workers estimated at $2 million over two years	Funds are in addition to current funding of over $4.3 million. Estimated cost for full implementation is $48.2 million, spread over five years
Provide opportunities for students to learn second languages	$2.2 million		Based on programs available for students in grades 4 - 9, to be phased in beginning at grade 4. Amount is an annual average to phase in grades 4-6. Actual costs will vary for each grade. Assumes instruction provided 10% of the day and French included as one of the second languages. Total cost to implement for grades 4-9 estimated at close to $17.0 million over six years.

For us to succeed in giving every child the chance to learn and succeed ... for us to have a highly skilled and well-educated workforce ... and for us to develop the kind of civil society Albertans want ... there is no better investment we can make than in education and the future of our children.

Phase one - Years 1 - 3 continued...

Priority initiative	Estimated annual incremental cost	Estimated one-time costs	Notes
Phase in implementation of proposed technology standards	$20.0 million		Total funding phased in over 5 years. Funds are in addition to current funding for technology and government support for schools' connection to SuperNet.
Total for phase one	$224.4 million	$49.0 million	

Phase two - Years 4 - 5

Priority initiative	Annual incremental cost	One-time costs	Notes
Implement class size guidelines for grades 4 - 6 and 7 - 9	$26.4 million	$11.2 million	Includes $25.1 million in instructional costs and $1.3 million in operations and maintenance funding. Costs for implementing guidelines for grades 10-12 cannot be estimated because there is no province-wide information on current class sizes for these grades.
Implement half-day junior kindergarten for all children	$86.0 million	Capital costs not included	Amount is in addition to at-risk children who are funded in phase one
Implement full-day kindergarten for all children	$86.0 million	Capital costs not included	Amount is in addition to full-day kindergarten for at-risk children funded in phase one
Complete implementation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework	$10.0 million		
Continue phasing in second languages	$3.2 million		Provides implemenation up to grade 8 with an additional year remaining for full implementation.
Expand access to technology in schools	$20.0 million		
Establish province-wide education link	$4.0 million	$18.0 million for technology	Estimates based on Health Link
Total	$235.6 million	$29.2 million	

Address the potential for savings

While several of the Commission's key recommendations have significant financial implications and can be phased in over time, other recommendations should result in streamlining and reducing costs including more standardized information and technology systems, joint use of facilities and services, the education link, and more flexible ways of delivering programs and services using technology.

The Commission also firmly believes that recommendations directed at early intervention and making sure children come to school ready to learn will result in substantial savings over time. Research evidence certainly supports a return on investment of roughly a seven dollar return for every one dollar invested in early intervention programs for children at risk. The results show up in lower health care costs, reduced crime rates, higher employment and income, and more independence for students who successfully complete school. While it is difficult to directly apply the results of US studies to the Alberta context, it is reasonable to assume that there would be significant long-term savings of a similar order of magnitude as in the US examples.

Based on the Commission's estimates of the costs of providing parenting centres, full-day junior kindergarten and regular kindergarten for at-risk children in the province (estimated at 20% of the total number of children), and using the same rates of return as long-term research studies in the US (ranging from 4:1 to 9:1 depending on the outcomes measured and the varying costs of each program), we estimate that the total costs of these programs would be $73.5 million while the long-term savings would range from $294 to close to $662 million.

Examine and implement new sources for additional funds

The Commission's consultations confirmed that the vast majority of people involved in this review believe that the provincial government should continue to be the primary funding source for Alberta's schools. And about half suggested that taxpayers would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to provide sufficient funds for Alberta's schools.

Prior to 1994-95, when all school boards had the right to tax their local residents as well as businesses and industrial property, there were serious inequities in funding for the education of students depending on the wealth of the community and the industries located within a school jurisdiction's boundaries. The objective in removing school boards' ability to tax was to ensure equity across the province and ensure that the quality of education students received was not determined by the property tax wealth in their communities. That objective has certainly been achieved.

On the other hand, school boards expressed frustration over the fact that their funding is now almost completely tied to funding decisions made by the provincial government. Ever since the province took over the collection of education property taxes, school boards have less flexibility and no ability to raise additional funds locally even if their residents are prepared to pay more.[104] They do have the ability to raise an additional 3% of their budgets by taxing local residents but a plebiscite is required and, to date, only a few school boards have attempted a plebiscite and none has been successful. School boards have suggested removing the plebiscite requirement and allowing them to raise an additional 3% of their budget without seeking the direct approval of their residents in advance. This would allow school boards to address local needs and their residents could hold them accountable for their decisions at election time.

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[104] Currently, 16 separate school boards have "opted out" of the Alberta School Foundation Fund, which means they requisition and collect property tax directly from municipalities. Under current legislation, there is no financial advantage to these school boards nor do they have the ability to raise more funds than other school boards.

"In losing the power to tax, school boards have lost a critical connection to their communities."

Alberta School Boards Association (2002, p. 22)

In addition, the Commission also heard concerns about increases in school fees paid by parents. While school fees provide an additional source of revenue and help offset certain costs, they also can be a hardship for parents, especially those with lower incomes and with several children in school.

94. Allow school boards to requisition their local residents for up to 10% of the amount raised through provincial education property taxes.

The Commission supports the principle of equitable funding for school jurisdictions and believes that the current system of having the province collect and redistribute education property taxes should be maintained. At the same time, the Commission feels strongly that the role of school boards is to address local needs and reflect the priorities of community members. School boards should have close ties with their electors and be accountable for the decisions they make. With little or no ability to raise additional funds, the connection of school boards to their communities is weakened and their ability to address local needs is minimal. The Commission believes that school boards should have a limited ability to raise funds from their residents to support local priorities.

With the new collective bargaining process proposed by the Commission, it is much more likely that additional funds raised through increasing local education property taxes would go directly to programs that reflect local needs and priorities. School boards would be accountable to their electors for their decisions, for the taxes that are levied, and for the results that are achieved. School boards would be required to make decisions annually on education property taxes as part of their budgeting process. To preserve equity in funding across the province, the ability to raise additional taxes should be limited to residential and farm property only and not include industrial or business property taxes.

The Commission considered the Alberta School Boards Association's proposal for school boards to be allowed to raise up to 3% of their budgets from education property taxes. Using this approach, jurisdictions with lower property values would have to increase property tax rates by a substantial percentage in order to raise 3% of their budget while in other areas where the value of property taxes is higher, the percentage increase in property tax rates would be considerably smaller. For this reason, the Commission believes it is fairer to residents to take into account the current education property taxes raised in a jurisdiction and to allow school boards to requisition up to an additional 10% of that amount. High growth areas with higher property values would be able to generate more funds than lower growth areas and this reflects the fact that the costs of educating students are also typically higher in high growth areas.

Overall, if all school boards decided to requisition up to the maximum of an additional 10% of education property taxes, the total amount of funds raised would be close to $71 million (based on the provincial education property tax residential requisition for 2002).

The Commission urges the provincial government to examine the detailed implications of this recommendation, work with school boards to refine the approach as necessary, and introduce a funding mechanism that maintains equity in funding but, at the same time, gives school boards a limited ability to tax their local residents.

5. Set province-wide policies on school fees that would:

- **Prohibit fees to cover the costs of basic education items**
- **Detail what charges can be levied and set maximum caps on school fees**
- **Allow reasonable fees for extracurricular activities.**

Parents have always played an active role in supporting their local schools in terms of both time and money. At the same time, education is a public good and the vast majority of the costs should be covered by public funds. Access to basic education is a right and should be available to all parents without substantial additional fees whether they live on a farm near New Brigdon or in downtown Calgary. While fees for most parents remain reasonable, a province-wide policy direction would ensure that fees are charged appropriately and are kept at reasonable levels. Alberta Learning should work with school jurisdictions, schools and school councils to review current policies, practices and fees and to develop provincial policy to guide local decisions on school fees. The policy should address all aspects of school fees including transportation and lunchroom fees.

Accounting for results

The following is a list of reporting requirements identified throughout our report. The intent is to ensure that the best results are achieved, policy directions are implemented, and the best use is made of the resources invested in education. These ongoing information requirements should be part of regular reports prepared by schools, school jurisdictions and the province on a series of measures and performance indicators and should be available to parents, students, community members and all interested Albertans on an annual basis. In some cases, such as results on student achievement tests and diploma exams, schools and school jurisdictions are already required to report this information on an annual basis.

Reporting requirement	To be reported by:
Students' completion of high school	High schools, school jurisdictions and the province
Average class sizes	Schools, school jurisdictions and the province
Support for schools (specialist services, counselling, etc.)	Schools and school jurisdictions
School improvement plans and results achieved	Schools and school jurisdictions
Results of Alberta Initiative for School Improvement projects	Schools, school jurisdictions and the province
Results for provincial achievement tests and related contextual information	Schools, school jurisdictions and the province
Results for diploma exams	High schools, school jurisdictions and the province
Professional development plans, time provided and results achieved	Schools and school jurisdictions
Fund-raising amounts and uses of funds	School councils, schools and school jurisdictions
Consistent and clear financial information	Schools, school jurisdictions and the province

Concluding comments

The Commission would like to thank the thousands of individual Albertans, parents and students, teachers and trustees, education stakeholders, and experts who participated in this important review. Just over a year ago, we issued an invitation for all interested Albertans to tell us their concerns and give us their best advice. In typical Alberta style, people rose to the challenge and offered us a wealth of ideas.

Clearly, Albertans care deeply about their education system. They want all our children to get the very best education we can provide. Alberta is fortunate to have one of the best education systems in Canada and North America. But that doesn't mean what we have today is good enough. The education system can and must continuously improve to meet the challenges of the future.

The Commission urges Albertans to review this report and think about the changes we have proposed. There is no doubt that some of our recommendations will be well received while others will be the subject of heated debates. That's a good thing. Our education system is too important to ignore, and the best results will come from ongoing discussion and debate, careful thought and deliberate action.

By working together and investing in the future of our children, the Commission is confident that Alberta will lead the country, if not the world, in the quality of education, and we'll achieve the vision. Every child will learn. And every child will succeed.

Every child **learns**.
Every child **succeeds**.

Appendix 1

List of Experts and Advisors
Presentations to the Commission

List of Experts and Advisors

Individual Guests and Experts from within Alberta

Andrews, Debra	Medical Director, School Rehabilitation Services; Medical Director, School-Aged Neurodevelopmental Assessment Clinic, Glenrose Hospital, Edmonton
Benowski, Larry	General Manager, Planning and Policy Services, City of Edmonton
Boutilier, Guy	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Chapman, Ken	Consultant
Dinning, Jim	Executive Vice President, Government Relations, TransAlta; Former Minister of Education and Former Minister of Finance
Evans, Iris	Minister of Children's Services
Hassen, Wendy	Consultant
Hobbs, Gillian	Principal, Governance West Inc.
Jonson, Halvar	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations; Former Minister of Education
Kurchina, Erin	Former Executive Assistant to the Board of Trustees, Calgary Board of Education
McPhail, John	Vice President, Human Resources, Capital Health Authority
Melnychuk, Janice	Councillor, City of Edmonton
Miller, Pete	Community Services Department, City of Edmonton
Newell, Eric	Chairman and CEO, Syncrude Canada Ltd.; Chairman, CAREERS: The Next Generation
O'Neill, Mary	MLA St. Albert; Chair, Standing Policy Committee, Health and Community Living; Former School Board Trustee, St. Albert
Ponting, Phil	Lawyer
Riopel, Janet	President and CEO, CAREERS: The Next Generation
Ross, David	Labour lawyer
Tidsbury, Neil	Executive Director, Construction Labour Relations, Alberta
Tuer, David	Lawyer; Chair, Alberta Financial Management Commission; Chair, Calgary Health Region
Wilkinson, Neil	Chair, Capital Health Authority

Individual Guests and Experts (National and from other provinces)

Benson, Mike	Executive Director, Ontario Principals' Council
Blakely, Bob	Director of Canadian Affairs – Building Trades
Campbell, Judith	Consultant, Health Issues
Dosdall, Emery	Deputy Minister of Education, British Columbia
Fullan, Michael	Dean, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Garabb-Read, Cathy	Senior Policy Advisor, Department of Education, New Brunswick
Hartmann, Norbert	Assistant Deputy Minister, Ontario Ministry of Education
Kaser, Linda	Superintendent, School and District Improvements, Ministry of Education, British Columbia
Laferrière, Thérèse	Institute for Knowledge, Innovation and Technology, Laval University
Milton, Penny	Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Education Association (CEA)
Mustard, Fraser	Founding President and Fellow, The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR)
Staple, John	Director, Economic Services, Canadian Teachers' Federation
Williams, Thomas	Director of Research and Policy, Queen's University

Organizations

Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association (ACSTA)
Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT)
Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (AHSCA)
Alberta Retired Teachers' Association (ARTA)
Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)
Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA)
Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools (AAPCS)
Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA)
Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)
Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta
Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA)

Education Community

In addition to individuals listed below, the Commission met with all school boards in Alberta through public consultation presentations, individual submissions, and meetings with superintendents, chairs, and trustees.

Barrett, Brenda	Co-Chair, Student Resource Centre, Grant MacEwan College
Beauchamp, Larry	Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Bond, Ronald	Vice President Academic, University of Calgary
Brandes, Pauline	Dean of Learning Effectiveness, Red Deer College
Bruinsma, Robert	Associate Vice President (Academic), The King's University College
Cowling, Joan	Chair, Canadian Association of School Boards; Former Edmonton Public School Board Trustee
da Costa, José	Associate Professor, Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta
Davis, Alan	Vice President Academic, Athabasca University
DeCorby, Emilie	Principal, St. Justin Catholic Elementary School
Denis, Karen	Principal, St. Gabriel Catholic School
Dietrich, Richard	Principal, Elmwood Elementary School
Hampton, Wayne	Principal, Wolf Creek School Division
Hart, Doug	Vice President Academic, Grande Prairie Regional College
Hess, Gretchen	Vice Provost, University of Alberta
LaGrange, Annette	Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary
Lewis, Irene	President, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)
Lynch, Sue	Director, Child Study Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Magnusson, Kris	Associate Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge
McConaghy, Judy	Dean of Education, Concordia University College
Montgomerie, Craig	Professor, Educational Psychology, University of Alberta
O'Dea, Jane	Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge
Olanyk, Julia	Vice President Academic, Northern Lakes College
Paterson-Weir, Janet	Vice President Academic, Grant MacEwan College
Peters, Frank	Associate Dean, Field Experience, University of Alberta
Read, Malcolm	Vice President Academic, Medicine Hat College
Shaw, Sam	President, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)
Smith, Rosalind	Principal, M.E. LaZerte High School
Spence, Ron	Principal, Thorncliffe School
Tardiff, Claudette	Doyenne, Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Alberta
Wilson, Peggy	Professor Emeritus, Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta
Wilson, Stanley	Associate Professor Emeritus, Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta

Provincial Government Departments

David-Evans, Maria	Deputy Minister, Learning (in addition to many members of the staff of Alberta Learning)
Ewart-Johnson, Shelley	Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Employment
Johnson, Malcolm	Assistant Deputy Minister, Health and Learning, Infrastructure
McIntyre, Art	Assistant Deputy Minister, Population Health, Health and Wellness
Meade, Paddy	Deputy Minister, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development
Newman, Judith	Project Team Leader, Population Health, Health and Wellness
Palmer, Roger	Deputy Minister, Health and Wellness
Shoush, Bronwyn	Director, Solicitor General's Office of the Coordinator for Aboriginal Justice Initiatives
Thompson, Sherry	Senior Research Liaison, Children's Services
Tyler, Paula	Deputy Minister, Children's Services

Aboriginal Stakeholders

Arcand, George Jr.	Associate Regional Director General, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Arfinson, Myles	Economic Development Officer, Métis Nation of Alberta, Zone #1
Boucher, Allan	Supervisor, Human Resources and Employment, Lac La Biche
Bouvier, Gabe	Elder
Cardinal, Clifford	Education Director, Beaver Lake First Nation
Cardinal, Phyllis	Principal, Amiskwaciy Academy
Cox, Sarah	Senior Policy Advisor, Education Renewal Initiative Secretariat Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Dahl, Delbert	Education Manager, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Ghostkeeper, Tom	Strategic Training Initiatives Director, Métis General Council
Houle, Tom	Chief, Goodfish Lake First Nation
Howse, June	Aboriginal Community Liaison and Education Career Counsellor, Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement
Howse, Mabel	Elder
Jobin, Frank	Director, Operational Program and Policy Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Laboucan, Kathleen	Educational Director, Treaty 8
Laderoute, Barb	Education Consultant, Métis General Council
Lakey, Donna	Elected Secretary, Métis General Council

Aboriginal Stakeholders continued...

Lameman, Al	Chief, Beaver Lake First Nation
Makokis, Bernie	Tribal Chiefs Education Director, Treaty 6
Menard, Denis	Dean, Portage College
Minard, Shirley	Principal, Boyle Street Education Centre, Edmonton
Patenaude, Theresa	Elder
Reid, Freddie	Elder
Robb, Barrie	Regional Director General, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Shade, Chris	Grand Chief, Treaty 7
Stanley-Venne, Muriel	President, Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women
Steele, Bob	District Principal, Aboriginal Learning Services, Edmonton Catholic Schools
Thompson, Laurie	Teacher, Kikino Métis Settlement
Thomson, Floyd	Chairperson, Kikino Métis Settlement
Wabie, Dianna	Director Aboriginal Services, Northern Lights School District
White, Denise	Counselor, Kikino Métis Settlement
Witt, Robin	Family Maintenance Worker, Human Resources and Employment, Lac La Biche
Young, Duane	Mayor, Lac La Biche
Zacharuk, Glen	Assistant Superintendent, Northern Lights School District

Presentations to the Commission[1]

- ABC Charter Public School
- Aboriginal Learning Centre, Edmonton Catholic Schools
- Advocate, Communicate, Educate
- Aga Khan Education Board for the Prairies
- Agrell-Smith, Jennifer
- Alberta Association for Bright Children
- Alberta Association for Community Living
- Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes
- Alberta Band Association
- Alberta Coalition for Healthy School Communities
- Alberta College of Social Workers
- Alberta Consortium of Rehabilitative and Assistive Technology
- Alberta Farm Animal Care
- Alberta Federation of Labour
- Alberta Home Education Association
- Alberta Online Consortium
- Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia
- Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired
- Albertans Promoting Public Education and Learning
- Ambrosio, Patty
- Andrais, Jim
- Andrews, Debra
- Andries, Will
- Annahity, Sarty
- Archbishop MacDonald School Council
- Arnold, Mary
- Association of Christian Schools International, Western Canada
- ATA Lakeland Sublocal 15
- ATA Local 6, Northern Spirit
- ATA Local 13, Greater Peace
- ATA Local 14, Livingstone Range
- ATA Local 15, Northern Lights
- ATA Local 16, Foothills
- ATA Local 17, Chinook's Edge
- ATA Local 25, Greater St. Paul
- ATA Local 26, Trumpeter
- ATA Local 31, Park Plains East
- ATA Local 35, Rocky View
- ATA Local 37, Edmonton Public
- ATA Local 38, Calgary Public
- ATA Local 40, Woodland Rivers
- ATA Local 41, Lethbridge
- ATA Local 43, Northern Gateway
- ATA Local 48, Fort McMurray
- ATA Local 54, Edmonton Catholic
- ATA Local 55, Calgary Separate
- ATA Local 69, Northland
- ATA Local 77, Fort Vermilion School Division
- ATA Local 80, Red Deer Separate
- ATA Negotiation Sub Committee
- ATA Specialist Councils:
    - Career and Technology Studies Specialist Council
    - Council on School Administration of the ATA
    - English as a Second Language Council of the ATA
    - Health & Physical Education Council of the ATA
    - Outreach Education Council of the ATA
    - Science Council
    - Social Studies Specialist Council of the ATA
    - Special Education Council of the ATA
- Athabasca Tribal Council
- Atwood, Dan
- Atwood, DeAnne
- Atwood, Kristie
- Autism Society Alberta
- Bainbridge, Joyce
- Baker, Jan
- Ballheim, Cynthia
- Bardak, Joanne
- Barendredgt, René W.
- Barranoik, Lois
- Bauer, Art
- Bazinet, Carol
- Beattie, Janet
- Beaverlodge Regional High School, School Council
- Belokrinicev, Brenda
- Belter, Herb
- Berndt, Carol
- Black, Jim
- Blessed Kateri School
- Blondheim, Marg
- Blumel, Dwayne
- Branch, Jennifer
- Brodie, Mark
- Brodie, Steven
- Brooks, David
- Brosinsky, Chris
- Brussé, Karin
- Buck, Claudia
- Budd, Denis
- Burdett, Christine
- Burke, Teeta
- Caernarvon Elementary School
- Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils
- Calgary Board of Education English as a Second Language Advisory Committee
- Calgary Chamber of Commerce
- Calgary Family Voices
- Calgary-Lougheed Constituents Focus Group
- Calvin Christian School
- Cameron, J. Kevin
- Campbell, Debbie
- Canadian Council for Exceptional Children, Alberta Federation
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
- Canadian Parents for French, Alberta Branch
- Canadian Taxpayers Federation
- Canyon School Council
- Capital Region Services to Children Linkages Committee
- Card, Brigham Y.
- Cardinal, Mark
- Case, Michelle
- Centre for Leadership in Learning
- Child and Adolescent Services Association
- Christianson, Matt
- Cisco Systems Canada Co.
- Clancy-Novosel, Patricia
- Clark, John
- Coalition for Equal Access to Education
- Colbens, Dorothy
- College Heights Christian School
- Cooper, Lori
- Cox, Marilyn
- Cox, Mary
- Crerar, Duff
- Crispin, Wendy
- Cundy, Linda J.
- CUPE Local 1012
- CUPE Local 1099
- CUPE Local 1357
- CUPE Local 1606
- CUPE Local 2545
- CUPE Local 3203
- CUPE Local 3484
- CUPE Local 3550
- CUPE Local 40
- CUPE Local 474
- CUPE Local 520
- CUPE Local 784
- CUPE Local 829
- Cutting, Bruce
- Dale, Ava
- Daniel, Darolyn
- Davidson, Deborah
- de Jong, Hilda
- De Vries, Dirk
- Detmers, Marylou
- Detmers, T.J.
- Donahue, Keith
- Donaldson, Lanni R.
- Donaldson, Lisbeth
- Donner, Sheila
- Dorosh, Grant
- Doylend, Colleen
- Dumontier, Gerald
- Duncan, Sherry
- Dunnigan, Mary
- Durda, Dianne
- Early Childhood Education Council
- Ecole Agnes Davidson Elementary School, School Council
- Ecole Greenview School, Parent School Council
- Ecole Westgate School Council
- Edmonton Academy, Society for the Learning Disabled
- Edmonton Autism Society
- Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities
- Edmonton Down Syndrome Society
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton Public Library
- Edmonton Regional Coalition for Inclusive Education
- Edwards, Lou
- Edwards, Mark
- Eeles, Art
- Elle, Cliff
- Elmworth School Council
- Elves Child Development Centre
- Engin, Karen
- Enk, Barb Van
- Epsilon Pi Tau
- Exceptional Families
- F.R. Haythome Junior High School, School Council
- Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta
- Fairview High School, School Council
- Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta
- Federation of Independent Schools in Canada
- Field, James
- Finkleman, Paul
- Firth, Bryan
- FitzGerald, Zinda
- Foothills' Council of School Councils
- Foothills Special Education Advisory Committee
- Forbes, Shirley
- Foster, Felicity
- Fox Creek School Council
- Fraser, Kim
- Fulham School Parent Advisory Council
- Galenzoski, Nora
- Galileo Educational Network Association
- Gallagher, Maureen
- Galvin, Kathryn
- Gaumont, Leo
- Gerard Redmond School Council & Parent Advisory Council
- Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT)
- Gibson, Susan
- Giesbrecht, Inga
- Gift Lake School District
- Gough, Andrea
- Goulet, Carmen
- Goulet, Ron
- Graham, Maura
- Grainger, Sean
- Gregson, Shirley
- Gulamhusein, Alifeyah
- Hampton, Wayne
- Hancock, Katelynn
- Hargreaves, George
- Haries, Karen
- Harker, Cheryl
- Harpe, Richard
- Harris, Merle
- Hart, Greg
- Harty, Diane
- Harty, Greg
- Haycock, Lana
- Hazeltine, Brian
- Health Services Utilization and Outcomes Commission
- Hebert, Yvonne M.
- Heikoop, Sjaane
- Heitrich, Lynda
- Helen E. Taylor School
- Henley, Patty

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[1] The list includes the names of individuals and organizations that made presentations to the Commission as part of its public consultations. It does not include major organizations and school boards that also made presentations and submissions. The Commission apologizes in advance if any names have been inadvertently missed.

Hertlein, Jody
Herzog-Punzenberger, Barbara
Heyking, Amy von
Hildebrandt, Lavon
Hill, Laurie
Hiller, Harvey
Historical Society of Alberta
Hofer, David
Holborn, Nancy
Holman, Wendy
Holyrood Elementary School Parents
Homer, Barb
Horch, Annalora
Houser, Mike
Huber, Carol
Hughes, Susan
Huizing, Hans
Hunter, Rhonda
Huntington Hills School Parent Council
Hutterian Brethren Church of Blue Ridge
Isberg, Lori
Isley, Laura
Ismaili Muslim Community
Jack, Rob
Jacques, Russ
Jaffray, Peter
Jantzie, Noel
Jaremko, Bev
Jasper Elementary School
Jasper Elementary School Parent Council
Jasper High School
Jellett, Christine
Jenkins, Frank
Jones, Patti
Jones, Stephen
Jurisic, Alexandra
Kaastrup, Nicole
Kachuk, Len
Karmali, Nashir
Kelly, Donna
Kimura, Pat
Kirkland, Patricia
Klassen, Andrea
Knights of Columbus
Knip, Fred
Knoch, Dave
Koinonia Christian School School Board
Kopp, Randy
Koschel, Hazel
Kozar, Frank
Kryzan, Andrew
Kuiken, Jake
Kumpf, Garry
Kunst, Noel
Lakeview School Council
Lamarche, Doug
Land, Ella
Language Research Centre, University of Calgary
Lavers, James
Lazzer, Stephanie
Leach, Garnet
Leblanc, Catherine
Lee, Jen
Lee, Rodney
Leffers, Helen
Lendrum School Council
Lerke, Douglas
Letain, Anne
Lethbridge Collegiate Institute School Council
Lettner, Alice
Levson, Dan
Lewis, Margaret
Life Values Society for Effective Education
Linden, Maureen
Litun, Barry
Livingstone School
Loranger, Paul
Louis St. Laurent School Council
Lund, Darren
Lymburn School
Magrath Elementary School Council
Mahon, Michael
Marler, Patty
Matheson, Rick
McCarthy, Brian
McClellan, Ray
McCrae, Doug
McGarva, Rob
McIntosh, Dana
Mckay, D. Bruce
Mckay, Flora
McKernan Elementary Junior High School
McKinnon, Graham
McNair, Paul
McPhee, June
McPherson, A. Blair
Medicine Hat Career and Technology Studies Teachers
Medicine Hat High School, Faculty Council
Medicine Hat High School, School Council
Mensch, Sue
Merali, Alim
Metcalfe, Brenda
Metcalfe, Wendy
Métis Nation of Alberta
Meyer, Lyle
Microsoft
Midgley, Gwyneth
Missal, Mark
Morris, Terry
Mount Pleasant School Council
Mullally, Brian
Mullen, Glenn
Museums Alberta
Myck, Jeff
Narine, Shari
Nash, Dan
Neilson, Jim
New Democrat Opposition Party
Newton, Leslie
Noble, Brenda
Northern Lights Literacy/School Improvement Program
Norton, Deryk
Norwood Child & Family Resource Centre
Nugent, Karen
Oakes, C.A.
Oberg, Dianne
Oberg, Gloria
O'Brien, Jesse
Oczkowski, Rhonda
Oishi, Cheryl
Old Scona Academic High School
Olson, Carol
Open Minds Program
Oudman, Jack
Ouellet, Micheline
Parents Advocating for Catholic Education
Parents for Public Education
Parents from Harry Balfour School
Parkland Composite High School
Payne, Angela
Pelech, William
Penner, Marianne
Picken, David L.
Pike, Duane
Pillibeit, Christiana
Pollard, Sandra
Ponoka Christian School
Pope John XXIII Catholic School
Popp, Kathleen
Porteous, Wendy
Prairie Association of Christian Schools
Pratt, Gregg
Price, Anne
Progressive Academy Education Society
Progressive Conservative Youth of Alberta
Pryce, Kathryn
Purcell, Allison
Quinton, Renee
Red Deer Lake Home & School Association
Reid, Rob
Representative Special Needs Organization
Reyda, Janice
Rhee, Suzanna Van
Ripkens, Roy
Ripley, Catherine
Ritter, Donna
Rix, Ralph
Rocky Christian School
Roessingh, Hetty
Rosalind Parent Council
Ross Sheppard School Council
Rowan, Elaine
Roy, Sylvie
Rudolf Hennig School Council
Rurka, Brian
Rush, Deborah
Rush, Melanie
Sabey, Jennifer
Sabey, Shannon
Sabourin, Cindy
Sabourin, Marc
Safe and Caring Schools Project Steering Committee
Salamon, Norbert
Sano, Kelly
Sarty, Annahity
Scarboro Community Association
Schaffer, Andie
Schilling, Jason
School Council Ecole Agnes Davidson Elementary School
School Technology Advisory Committee
Seaman, Ted
Selby, Darlene
Senior High School Principals' Association of the Calgary Board of Education
Seters, Gerald Van
Shaben, Larry
Sherin, Judith
Sherwin, Joyce
Shields, Martin
Siebenga-Valstar, Tena
Simpson, Darren
Siwatek, Diane
Skaley, Duane
Skaley, Natale
Slack, Larry
Smith, Bev
Smith, Dwayne
Smith, Rozina
Smits, Hans
Smyth, Mike
Society for Christian Education in Southern Alberta
Society for the Advancement of Gifted Education
Society for the Educational Advancement of the Hearing Impaired
Sommerville, Ed
Spearman, Chris
Special Needs Association for Parents and Siblings (SNAPS)
Spiess, Glenn
SPIRITUS
St. Hilda Parent Council
St. Mary's Parent Advisory Council
St. Monica School Parent Advisory Council
Stang, Egbert
Staples, Brian
Steele, Bob
Storch, Jim
Stumpf, Marylynne
Support Public Education - Act for Kids (SPEAK)
Swiatek, Diane
Symko, Bill
Tanis, Everett
Taylor, Alison
The Edmonton Advocates
Thibault, Katherine
Thomson, Joy
Thorncliffe Community School
Thorp, Louise
Toews, Maureen
Tomcala, A.
Troyer, Kary
Tuck, Phillip
Tullman, Lorna
Twible, Laura
Valliers, Line
Van Enk, Barb
Van Rhee, Suzanna
Van Seters, Gerald
VanderSpruit, Margaret
Vanderstoop-Walsh, Doreen
Vastenhout, June
Venner, Mary Ann
Vickers, Paul
Visser, Les
von Heyking, Amy
Voorhorst, John
Watson, Gordon
Watt, David L.E.
Wearmouth, Jack
Webb, Phil
Whetstone, Judy
White, Guy
White, Susan
Wiens, Vic
Windsor Park Elementary School, Parent Council
Wipf, Dave
Wipf, Jacob
Wolters, Margaret
Wright, Tricia
Yanover, Stephen
Yip, Marisa

Every child **learns**.
Every child **succeeds**.

Appendix 2

Consultation Highlights

Consultation highlights

Summarizing the wealth of information and ideas presented to the Commission is no small task. The most we can hope to provide are highlights of the key themes and directions brought to the Commission's attention through its consultations and research program.

Public consultations

Workbook responses

Literally thousands of Albertans responded to the invitation to provide their views on a series of issues outlined in the Commission's workbook. A team of people from Alberta Learning assisted the Commission by reviewing and coding each and every one of the responses and preparing a summary report. A copy of the report is included with this appendix.

It is important to note that the responses to the workbook were self-selected and therefore the results may not be considered as representative of the views of the majority of Albertans. Unlike randomly selected surveys, the workbook was available to all Albertans and anyone who was interested could choose to respond. People with a direct connection to the education system were more likely to respond to the workbook questions. In fact, close to 60% of the respondents indicated that they had children in school, almost 40% said they were parents, and 27% said they were teachers.

The views of close to 16,000 people - particularly those with a passionate interest in education - were vitally important to the Commission's work. The following provides highlights of the major themes identified through the workbook submissions. A more detailed summary is also included with this Appendix.

- ***A strong and well-balanced curriculum is critical.***

  Respondents viewed Alberta's curriculum as one of the strengths of the current education system. They believe the curriculum should be up-to-date and relevant. There should be a strong core that focuses on literacy and numeracy. In addition, they also supported an emphasis on science, citizenship, Canadian history, daily physical education, second languages, fine arts and culture, life skills, environmental education, international study of the history and cultures of other countries, and religion. The curriculum also should play an important role in instilling values such as respect for others, cooperation, social skills, good behaviour, and a positive work ethic. It should be a skills-based curriculum, providing students with lots of practical and hands-on experience as well as provide opportunities for students to learn critical thinking skills and how to learn rather than just learning facts. Close to three quarters of the respondents said that the curriculum should anticipate the changing needs of the workforce and ensure that students are well prepared. Over 80% said it was important or very important for schools to help students make transitions from school to post-secondary education and on to their careers.

- ***Teachers are strongly supported.***

  Alberta's teachers were identified as a major strength of the current education system. Teachers were considered the most important resource in the learning system and described as dedicated, high quality, highly qualified, caring and knowledgeable.

  At the same time, concerns were expressed that teachers are "overwhelmed" by the many and diverse responsibilities they face not only in the classroom but also in addressing additional responsibilities including counselling, coaching, acting as mentors, addressing the social and emotional needs of children, keeping pace with changing curriculum, and working with parents. In terms of factors that negatively affect the working conditions of teachers, respondents pointed to inadequate funding, class size and composition, lack of support for the integration of children with special needs, lack of assistance in the classroom, lack of time to plan and collaborate with colleagues, lack of time for professional development, and too much paperwork.

  There was strong support for ongoing professional development for teachers. More than 80% agreed or strongly agreed that teachers should be expected to upgrade their skills regularly and close to half said that teachers' performance should be assessed on an ongoing basis. Teacher accountability was identified as critical to children's education; teachers should be competent, love what they do, and be given "the time to teach." Close to 80% said that teachers should have more preparation time and 60% said the time they spend on extracurricular activities should be recognized through additional pay or time off. 36% said that extracurricular activities should be considered part of teachers' regular duties. The same percentage of people said that teachers should be paid on the basis of merit.

- ***Funding is viewed as inadequate.***

  Perhaps the most consistent message was that current funding was viewed as inadequate. Funding was identified as the major weakness in the current education system and also as one of the key obstacles to achieving excellence in the classroom. More than 90% of respondents said that more money should come from the province and 84% said the province should put more of a priority on education and spend less in other areas. 44% of respondents said that school boards should be able to tax their local residents. More than half suggested that new sources of revenue such as foundations should be considered. And more than half of the respondents also said people should be prepared to pay more in taxes to support education.

  In terms of where additional money is needed, the most common response was to reduce class size followed by additional support for special needs students. There also was strong support for using additional resources for technology in schools and for learning resources, especially when new curriculum is introduced.

- ***Class size is a serious concern.***

  Following general comments about inadequate funding, class size was the most common concern raised. Respondents said that class sizes were too large and, as a result, there is not enough time for teachers to help students who need extra assistance. Concerns were expressed about using pupil-teacher ratios as a measure of class size, particularly because principals and certificated non-teaching staff were included in the calculations. The composition of today's classrooms - with a diversity of children with different home experiences, special needs or English as a second language - makes class size an even more important concern.

  When asked about their vision for the future, respondents said they wanted to see smaller classes that were able to accommodate children's individual learning styles and interests and help each child achieve his or her potential. Class size was also seen as a current obstacle to achieving excellence in the classroom. More than 80% of respondents said that the province should set a maximum for the number of students in a classroom, especially for the lower grades. The mix of students in the classroom was also seen as an important factor and 90% of respondents said classes with children with special needs should be smaller than other classes.

- ***Schools need adequate resources and support beyond just money.***

  Respondents indicated that schools and teachers need to have the tools and resources necessary for them to do their work. Teachers should have a wide range of support to assist them in assessing and addressing the diverse needs of children in their classrooms. Adequate support should be in place for integrating children with special needs. Concerns were expressed that classroom supplies are limited, there aren't enough textbooks, computers, and other learning resources, and teachers often spend their own money to make up for inadequacies.

  The need for additional support extends beyond the education system - 83% of respondents said that schools and teachers should have more support from social, health and community agencies and 84% said that teachers need more support in assessing and addressing learning needs. The vast majority (90%) said that teachers needed more support in addressing behaviour problems of students in school.

- ***More support is needed to achieve the best results from integrating children with special needs.***

  Serious concerns were raised about the lack of sufficient support for integrating children with special needs into regular classrooms. When asked about major weaknesses in the current education system, respondents suggested that integration of children with special needs was not working as well as it should because there was a lack of support and resources. The "true costs" of integration are not covered and inadequate funding impacts all children in the classroom not just the children with special needs. 23% of respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that students with special needs should be included in the classroom. However, when asked about their vision for the future, respondents identified the need to include children with special needs in the regular classroom as a key component. In order for the integration of children with special needs to be more effective, 90% say classes with special needs children should be smaller and 93% said more support should be provided for students and teachers in classes with special needs students. The need for specially trained teachers and teaching assistants, access to specialists, and additional equipment was also identified.

- ***Choice is a strength of Alberta's education system.***

  The ability to choose among public and separate schools, francophone schools, private schools, charter schools, home schooling, distance learning, and a variety of alternative programs within the public system was viewed as a strength that is unique to Alberta. Respondents suggested that diversity enhances the quality of education, enhances accessibility, provides more options for parents and students, provides parents with a right to choose, strengthens the overall system, and allows for religious instruction.

  At the same time, the view was also expressed that too much choice detracts from a strong public education system. It can result in inequities and disadvantages among school jurisdictions, some of which are unable to provide the diverse choices that are available in larger jurisdictions. Too much choice also creates elitism, it can promote intolerance, and it stretches the "pie" of funding too far. Opinions were divided on funding for private schools.

In addition to these key themes, there also were a number of important findings in the workbook results.

- Alberta's provincial testing programs were strongly supported - close to 80% of respondents said province-wide testing should be done. When asked about support for province-wide testing at specific grade levels, the strongest support (63%) was for testing at the grade 12 level and the weakest support (28%) was for testing at grade 3.
- In terms of making sure children are ready for school, suggestions included mandatory kindergarten (74% agreed or strongly agreed kindergarten should be mandatory), graduated kindergarten programs over two years, full-day kindergarten and a standardized curriculum for kindergarten. Respondents also suggested early identification of special learning needs, early intervention and early literacy, assessment of readiness for school, parent education and involvement, and funding for preschool and home/parent support.
- Respondents felt strongly that both principals and superintendents should continue to be teachers.
- More than half of respondents said that fund-raising should be limited to "extras" and not used to cover the costs of operating schools or textbooks while just over 30% said parents should pay for the extras.
- Inequities between rural and urban schools should be addressed by providing adequate funding, redistributing funding to reflect needs in rural communities, improving technology and distance learning, allowing school boards to tax their local residents, increasing transportation funding, and consolidating schools and programs.
- When asked about the factors that affect excellence in the classroom, close to half ranked well-trained and effective teachers as the number one factor while just over 40% ranked fewer students in the classroom as the top priority.

Public meetings

As part of its public consultations, the Commission also listened to over 300 presentations at its public meetings across the province. Many of the presentations echoed the major themes identified in the responses to the workbook.

- The need for additional resources was a common theme. But the message was more than simply "give us more money." Groups and organizations, teachers, trustees, school support staff and parents repeatedly identified specific issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the education of students across the province. While more money was not necessarily seen as the only answer, they indicated that current resources were stretched to the limit, costs were increasing, and this made it increasingly difficult to meet the diverse needs of children in the classroom.
- The Commission heard the passionate concerns of teachers who were struggling to meet the diverse and challenging needs of children in their classes. Their most consistent concern was with class size.
- Parents and school councils expressed their strong support for the schools their children attended. They supported smaller class sizes, the need for adequate funding, support for children with special needs, and also raised issues related to fund-raising and fees.
- The Commission also heard extensively from school support staff including custodians, teaching assistants and library technicians. From custodians, the Commission heard about the impact of insufficient funding on the ongoing operations and maintenance of schools. From other support staff, the Commission also heard about insufficient resources to provide the support students and teachers need.
- Successful transitions from high school to post-secondary education and the workforce were also a concern. People talked about the need to ensure that more students complete high school and are well prepared to succeed at post-secondary education or to move directly into the workforce. This is particularly important with a growing knowledge-based economy in the province, in Canada and around the world.
- Through meetings with school boards, the Commission heard a range of concerns including the need for adequate funding, the challenges of delivering a comprehensive quality education in smaller rural communities, responding to growth in larger urban centres, and providing adequate programs and support for the diversity of children in their schools, especially children with special needs. The Commission also heard about a number of governance-related issues including school boards' right to tax, the number and role of school boards, and the responsibility of boards particularly in relation to collective bargaining.
- Both parents and representatives of charter schools, alternative programs, and private schools talked about the importance of choice and diversity in the education system and stressed the benefits of their particular approaches. Advocates for private schools also recommended increases in provincial funding for private schools.
- The Commission heard that school facilities need sufficient resources for upgrading, modernization and better maintenance. Particularly in growing communities, the need for new schools was the top priority for several school boards.
- The need for better and more coordinated support for children with special needs was highlighted by a number of presenters.
- Particularly in northern communities, serious concerns were expressed about the achievement and engagement of Aboriginal students, as demonstrated by their completion rates and results on provincial achievement tests.

Education stakeholders and experts

One of the key aspects of the Commission's consultation process involved discussions with representatives of teachers, school boards and administration. The Commission also had the opportunity to meet with a variety of experts in education and related fields. While it is difficult to summarize all of the various issues, ideas and suggestions raised by these organizations and experts, it's fair to say that the most consistent concerns centred around the following issues.

- ***Alberta has one of the best education systems in the world. We need to maintain and strengthen the system at a time when it is facing a number of challenges.***

  Almost without exception, education stakeholders identified the quality of Alberta's education system as the starting point. Unlike reviews done in other provinces or countries, our education system is not in a crisis. In fact, one of the key messages from stakeholders was to build on the strengths and not risk losing the best features of what we have today - an excellent curriculum, dedicated teachers, capable trustees, active and engaged parents, and results that lead the rest of the country. At the same time, there were concerns that some of these strengths are at risk, primarily as a result of what many say is inadequate funding.

- ***The education system needs adequate and predictable funding.***

  The issue of funding was raised in virtually every submission from education stakeholders. In many cases, the concerns focused on the adequacy of current provincial funding, particularly in view of increasing demands and expectations of schools. In addition, suggestions were made that school boards need additional sources of revenue, including a limited ability to tax their local residents. In the view of the Alberta School Boards Association, for example, "In losing the power to tax, school boards have lost a critical connection to their communities."[1] Other education stakeholders identified the need for school boards to have more flexibility in how funding is allocated to meet common goals and expected outcomes. The College of Alberta School Superintendents suggested that provincial funding should be based on a clear set of principles including consistent application of rules and conditions across the province, fair and equitable treatment, transparency in allocation formulas, flexibility to address local needs and priorities, and predictability to allow jurisdictions to make strategic plans. Many school boards echoed the same concern, calling for sufficient, sustainable and stable funding so that school boards could plan over the longer term.

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[1] ASBA (2002, p. 22).

- ***Schools are suffering from "mandate creep."***

  "Schools are no longer just houses of learning. Those days are long past."[2]

  Several submissions from stakeholders talked about the increasing challenge of meeting the wide range of students' needs, many of which extend well beyond the traditional role of schools. This is particularly the case for children with special needs, behaviour problems, family and social problems, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and mental illness. Schools and teachers frequently find themselves filling a vacuum when other services are not available in the community. Education stakeholders suggested a variety of approaches including more clearly defining and limiting the mandate of schools to focus primarily on teaching, learning and increasing student achievement, taking broader actions to coordinate services both at the provincial and community levels, and making schools the centre for all services for children.

- ***Without adequate support, there are serious challenges in integrating and providing appropriate programs for children with special needs.***

  Education stakeholders support the integration of children with special needs provided that it's in the best interests of the student and that adequate support - both financial and professional - is in place. They expressed serious concerns, however, about the level of support that is available to make integration a positive option for both the child with special needs and the other children in the class. For a variety of reasons, the number of children with special needs is increasing. School boards suggested that, while funding has increased substantially, it still does not cover the full costs of providing programs for children with a range of special needs. Teachers indicated that they are, at times, overwhelmed by the expectations for individual plans to be developed and implemented for every child with special needs. They indicated that there isn't enough time available to plan appropriately, work with teaching assistants, assess and report on the progress of children with special needs, on top of the teachers' ongoing responsibilities for the rest of the class.

- ***A range of opinions was expressed on class size and how this issue should be addressed.***

  Many submissions from education stakeholders commented on the issue of class size, but their views were somewhat mixed. There was general agreement that class sizes should not be legislated. There is a need for some flexibility to take into account the particular circumstances of each school. However, there was a call for maximum limits to be placed on class size, particularly in the early grades. On the other hand, school boards in particular emphasized the need for flexibility and did not advocate for specific limits or guidelines on class size.

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[2] Ibid, p. 15.

- ***Roles, responsibilities and accountability should be clear for all those involved in the education system.***

  In several submissions from education stakeholders there was a call for clarification of roles and responsibilities, particularly for school jurisdictions and the provincial government. Concerns were expressed that school boards have become less autonomous, particularly since they no longer have the right to tax their residents. A number of organizations also raised concerns that the province appears to be taking more of a "top down" approach, providing more direction to school jurisdictions and involving education stakeholders less directly in provincial policy directions and key areas such as curriculum. As a result of these perceptions, several organizations suggested that the roles and responsibilities need to be clarified. There also was strong support for a continuing emphasis on accountability both through province-wide testing programs and through consistent, transparent, open and understandable reporting, particularly in terms of spending on the education system.

- ***Adequate funding needs to be in place to ensure that schools are properly maintained and regularly upgraded. Funding also needs to be available to build new schools where and when they are needed most.***

  Particularly from school boards, the Commission heard consistent concerns about the adequacy of current funding for operating and maintaining schools. A 1999-2000 audit of schools showed that about 10% of schools were in poor condition, 43% in fair condition, and 47% in good condition. Additional funding provided by the province since then has reduced the percentage of schools in fair condition and increased the number in good condition. In spite of significant funding provided in the Centennial Capital Plan in the province's budget for 2003, there will continue to be a substantial backlog in maintenance of schools. Overall funding for operations and maintenance of schools is not viewed as adequate although additional funding provided in June 2003 should help address rising costs particularly related to utilities. In terms of new schools, there is a serious dichotomy. On the one hand, there is a substantial excess of school space in some jurisdictions across the province while, on the other hand, in high growth areas, new schools can't be built quickly enough to meet the demands.

- ***Teacher preparation and ongoing professional development are critical to continually improve Alberta's schools.***

  Education stakeholders clearly recognized the need not just for excellent initial preparation of teachers but also for ongoing professional development. The importance of "professional learning communities," where principals and teachers connect with parents and work together to focus on improving students' achievement, was highlighted in a number of submissions. The need for ongoing professional development was also stressed in a number of submissions, particularly professional development that was focused at the school level.

- ***More attention should be paid to the early years so children come to school ready to learn.***

  A number of stakeholders and experts stressed the importance of starting early, working with young children, identifying learning problems before children begin school, and providing early interventions to improve their chances of success at school. The Commission heard from experts about the effectiveness of parenting centres in providing support for parents of young children and building early links between parents and schools. The Commission also heard about the importance of early interventions especially for at-risk children and the benefits of moving to full-day kindergarten, provided that well-trained teachers and effective programs are in place. Concerns were also expressed about the need for better coordination and gaps in support for children before and after they begin school.

- ***Steps should be taken to restore and maintain peace on the labour relations front.***

  The serious impact of the province-wide labour disruptions in 2002 was felt by all partners in the education system including teachers, trustees and the provincial government, and especially by students and their parents. Overall, there was a feeling that this was an aberration in Alberta's history and clearly, no one wanted to see the situation repeated. Some stakeholders indicated that there was no need for major changes in the current arrangements for collective bargaining while other stakeholders and experts in labour relations indicated that there was an imbalance in power between the Alberta Teachers' Association and school boards. Concerns also were expressed about the role of the province. Although the province is not a party to the collective bargaining process, suggestions were made that the province influenced the process and, as the sole funder of education, was like a silent partner at every negotiating table.

In addition to these overall themes, hundreds of specific ideas, suggestions and recommendations were made by education stakeholders and experts. All of this advice was carefully considered by the Commission in identifying priorities and making our recommendations for the future.

Youth consultations

Two sessions were held with high school students - one in Calgary and one in Grande Prairie. With just over 100 students participating, the views of these students are a sample of students' views and cannot be considered representative of the views of all students in the province. The students involved were active, energetic and articulate young people who were more than happy to share their views on education with the Commission. A more detailed summary is included with this Appendix.

Three main themes were the most important for the young people involved in the consultation.

- ***More counsellors and better information are needed.***

  Most of the students had plans to go on to post-secondary education and their concerns were with the shortage of counsellors and information on the range of options available to students. Many said that university and post-secondary education were presented as the only viable "first choice" for students. They also had concerns about not having enough money to go on to post-secondary education, the lack of peer support, and concerns about job security, finding challenging work and making the move to post-secondary education.

  In terms of recommendations, they suggested that there should be more counsellors in schools. Counsellors should have better information about the range of options available and also should be able to provide support in dealing with drug and alcohol programs and stress management. Students want help from counsellors in setting goals and becoming more self-aware and they want more information on different pathways to careers, job hunting and career planning, financial planning, and access to funding for post-secondary education. They also suggested that teachers need more knowledge about post-secondary options other than university and parents and other mentors should be involved in providing "real world" advice.

  Participants also suggested a number of ways of improving the information available to students including more open houses, job shadowing, career fairs, tours and mentorships. They suggested better access to local professionals, more information on financing options, mass media advertising, and more emphasis on the trades. They also suggested that counsellors should start talking with students about post-secondary and career choices much earlier than grade 12, preferably starting in junior high or earlier.

- ***Students want teachers to be passionate motivators.***

  The young people involved in the consultation said their biggest concern was that teachers don't always have the passion or the motivation to provide an innovative learning environment for students. They want material presented to them in ways that connect with them and their experiences. They expect their teachers to have subject-area expertise, to be creative in their teaching and learning techniques, to help students learn a wider range of skills, and to help prepare them for diploma exams. They suggested that more professional development should be available for teachers, special assistance should be available for special needs and English as a second language (ESL) students and teachers should share best practices. They also said that teachers should be evaluated regularly and some suggested that should include evaluations by their students.

- ***Changes are needed, especially in the Career and Life Management curriculum.***

  The most compelling theme was the need for schools to prepare them for independent living - teaching youth to be adults.[3] They called for more life and skills-based courses including more emphasis on skills like learning how to learn, debating and making presentations, listening, decision-making, team work, relationship and communications skills, and personal financial planning. In their view, the current Career and Life Management program was "irrelevant, out dated, and not useful." They suggested more flexibility in the curriculum so students could experiment more, and more hands-on learning. They also suggested that the stigma around Career and Technology Studies courses should be broken down so these courses are not viewed as primarily for less academic students. They want a closer connection between post-secondary courses and high school content.

In addition to those three major areas of concern, the students involved in the consultation also suggested that:

- Class sizes are a concern. Principals should determine the most appropriate class size based on the skills of the teacher and the subject matter. Teaching assistants can provide individual attention and steps could be taken to improve teachers' abilities to manage larger classrooms.
- The diversity of students' needs is also a concern. Suggestions were made that the pure and applied courses should be separate and that more should be done to improve the effectiveness of ESL programs.
- Looking to the future, students would like to see more technology integrated into the classroom and used to help students build essential skills. Resources like lab equipment and textbooks also need to be updated.

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[3] GPC (2003, p. 6).

Aboriginal consultations

Alberta's Aboriginal population is growing rapidly and all information provided to the Commission points to serious concerns with the outcomes and achievement of Aboriginal children and youth. To address these concerns, the Commission met with representatives of the various First Nations, Treaty 6 Chiefs, directors of education for Treaty regions 7 and 8, with Métis Settlements and Métis Nations organizations, representatives of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, representatives of Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and with Alberta Learning staff involved in Aboriginal education. We also visited a number of schools including the Amiskwaciy Academy, Kikino School, Beaver Lake First Nation Reserve School, and J.A. Williams High School in Lac La Biche, and met with people involved in Edmonton Catholic's Rainbow Spirit project.

While the Commission learned that considerable efforts have been made, the results are clearly less than acceptable. In fact, it's tragic how few Aboriginal students achieve results that are comparable to non-Aboriginal children and how few of them graduate from high school. Through its discussions, the Commission heard that:

- The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework developed by Aboriginal representatives and Alberta Learning is a good starting point. More study is not the answer; it's time for action.
- Little real progress will be made until Aboriginal parents and community members have responsibility and accountability for the education of their children.
- The complexity of current roles and responsibilities among First Nations, the federal and provincial governments is a barrier that needs to be addressed and resolved.
- There are isolated cases where good progress is being made, but unfortunately, these positive developments are not widespread.
- Better linkages between schools and parents are critical. In many cases, Aboriginal parents have not had positive experiences with schools. The experience of residential schools continues to haunt many parents. Effective ways of engaging parents in the school and education of their children need to be developed.
- More Aboriginal teachers are needed not only for First Nations and Métis Settlement schools but also for schools across the province. Given the increasing numbers of Aboriginal children, all teachers should be well prepared to meet the needs of Aboriginal children in their classes.
- Improving the outcomes for Aboriginal children will bring tremendous benefits not only to Aboriginal children, their families and their communities but also to the entire Alberta society.

The Commission's research program

Assisted by a small research staff, the Commission undertook an extensive research program designed to seek the best information, evidence and advice on the variety of issues under the Commission's mandate.

Overall, roughly 400 articles, reports, studies and books were reviewed as part of this research program. Summaries were prepared and reviewed by Commission members. Wherever possible, research and evidence was used to guide and inform the Commission's recommendations. An independent review of the Commission's bibliography, undertaken by the Canadian Education Association, confirmed that the list of studies was comprehensive, current and reflected reliable sources.[4]

It simply is not possible to summarize the wealth of research information reviewed by the Commission. To do so would be a separate study in itself and take weeks to prepare. Consequently, the Commission has opted to provide a selected bibliography of the various reports, studies and articles reviewed as part of the research program. In addition, highlights of research related to the Commission's recommendations are provided wherever possible.

It's fair to say that, while there is a wealth of opinion and ideas about education and different ways in which the system should be changed, there isn't always the same abundance of sound, long-term and evidence-based research. In some areas such as governance, for example, there is little research on the effectiveness of different governance models, the advantages and disadvantages of different sizes of school jurisdictions, or the effectiveness of different collective bargaining alternatives. Generally speaking, there are plenty of opinions in these areas but little in the way of solid evidence. In areas such as class size for children in the early grades or the impact of early interventions on children at risk there is much more extensive and, in some cases, longer term studies to rely on. The Commission's experience clearly points to the need for continuous, ongoing and long-term research to guide future policy decisions in education.

To the extent possible, the Commission used the best research available to guide its recommendations. In some cases, the research evidence simply was not available and the Commission relied instead on its own judgment and the best advice from education stakeholders, experts, parents, students, and other Albertans.

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4 Milton (2003).

In summary ...

While the issues and ideas were as diverse as the education system itself, the Commission certainly heard several clear and consistent messages through its consultations.

- Albertans are strong supporters of our public education system and want to see it maintained and strengthened. They see education as vitally important to the future of Alberta's children and our province and something that deserves the strong support of all Albertans.
- Alberta has an outstanding education system. But people are worried we may be losing ground.
- Money is an issue and most people involved in the education system feel that funding is not adequate to meet current demands and expectations.
- Class size is a serious concern, especially among teachers and parents.
- Teachers, principals, superintendents and all those who work with children in Alberta's schools need to be thoroughly prepared for their jobs. Ongoing professional development is critical.
- Support for educating children with special needs - both financial and professional - is not sufficient. More needs to be done to coordinate and integrate services for children, many of which extend beyond the responsibilities of schools.
- It's important to start early and take steps to make sure children are ready for school.
- The education of Aboriginal children is not working well and the result is too many children and youth are being left behind.
- No one wants to see a repeat of the turmoil and tension caused by the teachers' strikes in 2002.

Workbook Summary - Key Themes[1]

- **Note:** demographic information is dependent on self-identification and much depends on how respondents see themselves and their role within the learning system. For instance, many respondents simultaneously identified themselves as a taxpayer, teacher, parent, and business owner. As there was a lack of clarity, no analysis by identified role has been done.
- **Note:** the volume of submissions received may be misleading as the online consultation did not prevent multiple online submissions and/or the duplication of paper and online submissions
- **Note:** the database used to receive, read, and summarize submissions, while an excellent public consultation resource, is not a traditional survey tool with the usual associated, objective rigour. Rather than reporting on responses from individuals chosen as part of a random representative sample of the provincial population, the results of this report are a summary of those who chose to provide a submission to the Commission. Because this was not a random survey, then, it is not possible to generalize these workbook findings to the entire population of Albertans.
- **Note:** as this is a summary of comments rather than an analysis, some comments under a theme may be contradictory.

Process

- A summary team of approximately 25 was responsible for the reading, summarizing and coding of workbook submissions.
- The process of coding involved reviewing a respondent's submission, ascertaining its key messages, and summarizing as necessary using self-identified keywords.
- These keywords could then be searched and key themes were clarified.
- All paper submissions mailed to the Commission offices were entered manually into the online workbook for subsequent coding.

Demographics (refer to Attachment 1)

- Over 15,800 submissions were received
- Approximately 9,000 online submissions were received during the 11-week public consultation phase
- Another 6,800 submissions were mailed to the Commission offices
- More than 60% of the workbooks mailed to the Commission offices arrived during the last 3 weeks of the extended deadline for submissions
- More than 58% of respondents identified themselves as having children in the basic learning system
- The total number of individuals (1,074) who identified themselves as being 18 and under may be misleading
    - Many respondents may have incorrectly thought this question referred to the age of their children in the basic learning system
    - There is some evidence of this in their response to the questions, in which they describe the schooling of their children
- A decline in response rates through questions 1-26 is evident (81% to 44%)
    - This is could be due to the number of workbook questions

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[1] This workbook summary was prepared by the Alberta Learning team directly involved in reading, coding and summarizing workbook submissions. The Commission appreciates their tremendous support in this important component of the Commission's work.

Final Summary Report

Question	Identified Key Themes
1. What is working well in today's education system? What are the major strengths that must be maintained?	**Teachers** • dedicated • high quality • excellent teacher training (university training required to be a teacher) • highly qualified • professional development • caring • retention of teachers • attraction of teachers • overwhelmed **Curriculum** • curriculum • curriculum development • technology • core subjects • balanced education (core subjects + alternatives such as music, art, etc.) • learning opportunities • alternative programs **Achievement** • achievement • learner success • quality public/separate education **Choice** • choice • public/separate • catholic system • right of parents to educate **Quality** • quality education • public education • accessibility • preparation for life • preparation for work
2. What aspects are not working as well? What are the major weaknesses?	**Funding** • government funding is inadequate; grants do not reflect real costs • adequate funding should be viewed as an investment in the future of all Albertans • specific areas of funding concern as identified by respondents include: - Human Resources - Teaching resources - Technology - Facilities - Fundraising and school fees **Class size** • the pupil/teacher ratio (PTR) is too high • principals and non-teaching staff should not be included in the PTR calculation • not enough time to help students who need some extra help • composition of today's classroom makes the issue of class size more critical **Integration of special needs students / Lack of resources for integration** • integration of special needs into regular classrooms is not working well • a lack of support and resources for integrating special needs students (e.g., no teaching assistants or assistant assigned part-time even though "needs" are full-time) • true costs of integration are not covered • inadequate funding for integration impacts all students in a classroom, not just special needs students **Teachers' Working Conditions** • inadequate funding, class size and composition, and lack of support for integration contribute to difficult working conditions for teachers • lack of assistance for teachers in the classroom, lack of time to plan and collaborate with colleagues, inadequate time for professional development, and too much paperwork also contribute to this sentiment

Question	Identified Key Themes
3. What is your vision for the classroom of the future? Try to be as specific as possible about what aspects it would include.	**Class Size, Composition, and Classroom Conditions** • a desire to see small class sizes, small pupil/teacher ratios (with the condition that only actual teachers be included in the formula), or specific quotas (e.g. maximum 22 students/class) • accommodating children's individual learning styles and interests will help each child achieve his/her potential • the importance of the inclusion of special needs children in the regular classroom **Classroom resources and supplies (including technology)** • classrooms must have the necessary resources to teach, textbooks for every child and all supplies and materials (maps, atlases, classroom books etc.) to enrich the learning experience • access to technology is important. This includes supplying technology, upgrading technology, integrating technology and providing technical support to maintain technology • access to computers either in the classroom or a fully equipped computer lab Curriculum • identification of the curriculum as an area of concern with a wide range of suggestions to improve it: - an up-to-date, relevant, and skills based curriculum that provides children with lots of practical and hands-on experience - a strong core curriculum that focuses on literacy and numeracy - daily physical education to promote lifelong health - second languages - reducing curriculum expectations to reduce learner stress - critical thinking skills - life skills - integration of faith and spirituality Special Education • inclusion of special needs children in 'regular' classrooms has an impact on classroom conditions • special needs children should receive extra support both in terms of funding and properly trained personnel • gifted and talented children need enrichment programs so that their needs are not ignored • ESL students need extra assistance to improve their integration into the school system Teachers' Working Conditions • Related to professional development and preparation time and ensuring adequate time and funding for both Funding • abundant, consistent funding will improve the future classroom. Funding to support small class sizes, provide classroom resources, supplies and technology and to supply the appropriate staff to support every child's needs • the Alberta government must recognize education as a priority in the province as well as an investment in future citizens of Alberta

Question	Identified Key Themes
4. What are your expectations for schools in the future? What can and should we reasonably expect from our schools? What should the top five priorities be?	**Skills and Knowledge Development** • students should have the opportunity to develop a range of skills and knowledge required for success in future endeavours, including: - citizenship - reading and writing (literacy) - focus on math and science - critical thinking and problem solving - focus on the basics - students should have the opportunity to develop a range of skills and knowledge required for success in future endeavours. Although reading and writing, math and science were key skills mentioned by respondents, knowledge related to citizenship was the most frequently cited **Instil Positive Values** • respect for others • take personal responsibility • good social skills • good behaviour • students to learn how to cooperate and share **Good Processes** • parents should be accountable for the actions of their children • emphasis needs to be placed on the home and school working together • an appropriate balance should be struck between the role of teachers and the role of parents. Excellent teaching staff should be available in the schools • funding should be adequate to maintain an effective learning environment • adequate teacher/student support should be in place • fewer responsibilities should be delegated to teachers and schools (e.g. counselling, psychological services, etc.) **Students Prepared for the Future** • prepared for post-secondary studies or a trade • prepared for work • generally prepared for life • work ethic • productive members of society **Good Environment** • safe and caring schools • socialization and physical activity • adequate resources • small class size • positive role models for students

Question	Identified Key Themes
5. Alberta's school system provides choice for students and parents in many parts of the province while, in other areas, it is difficult to provide the same level of choice. Does this diversity add to or detract from the central purpose of the public education system?	Adds to the central purpose • diversity adds to the central purpose of the public education system • diversity and choice are important - enhancing the quality and success of education, providing opportunities, and reflecting parent choice and the diverse needs of students • diversity is simply reality - reflecting the choices we make when we choose where to live and the realities/trade-offs involved in urban vs. rural lifestyles • Catholic education is an important alternative and choice for students and parents • the right of parents to make choice for their children's education is important Detracts from the central purpose • diversity detracts from the central purpose of the public education system • there is too much diversity and choice within the system - creating inequity and disadvantages between districts/students, reducing opportunities and choices for students, creating elitism and a two-tier education system, promoting intolerance in some cases, or stretching the funding pie too far Equity and Equality • equality is important, including equal opportunities, equal access and equal funding • regardless of diversity, there should be a basic curriculum in place for all students • adequate or increased funding is required to support diversity and reduce inequities • special needs should be addressed appropriately Public versus Private schools • only public schools should be funded • private schools add value and should receive more government support • introduce a school voucher system • private schools promote elitism, intolerance, and a two-tier education system
6. Do you think provide-wide testing should be done: • In every grade • In a few grades Please circle the grades you think should have province-wide exams.	Achievement Exams • 79% of the documents agreed to province-wide testing in a few grades: • Grade 3 = 28% of documents • Grade 6 = 47% • Grade 9 = 53% • Grade 12 = 63% • Not at all = 22% • In every grade = 6%

Question	Identified Key Themes
7. **What measures should be put in place to assess the performance of the school system in addition to student achievement?**	Surveys - includes: • Surveys as a means of measuring performance, including: - parent satisfaction surveys - student satisfaction surveys - teacher satisfaction surveys - or an all encompassing teacher, parent, student survey Achievement • Refers to the measurement of student achievement and its current usage as a performance assessment - Achievement viewed as a poor measure of performance - Achievement (including diagnostic testing, standardized testing, testing basic skills, and performance based testing) should be measured Student Evaluation • Includes additional ways to evaluate students other than through achievement, including: - assessment by teachers - student demographics - citizenship - attitude - student growth - participation in extracurricular activities - social skills - participation School statistics • pertains to measures that a school could use to assess the performance of the school system, including: - drop-out and retention rates - percentage of graduates - number of students going to post-secondary learning - percentage of post-secondary graduates - attendance - post-graduation success of students - student/teacher ratio Teacher evaluation • refers to the evaluation of teachers' performance through such tools as: - evaluation by parents - professional development - teacher quality - general assessments
8. **There are a number of factors that affect excellence in the classroom. What priority would you give to the following factors? Please rank them in priority of 1-10 with 1 being the highest priority.**	Please refer to Table 1.

Question	Identified Key Themes
9. People have suggested a number of ways of continually improving schools' performance. Consider the following statements and indicate whether you agree or disagree with them.	a. Teachers should be expected to upgrade their skills regularly: • Strongly agree / Agree = 81% b. Teachers' performance should be assessed on an ongoing basis: • Strongly agree / Agree = 47% c. Teachers should have more preparation time: • Strongly agree / Agree = 77% d. The time teachers put into to support extracurricular activities should be considered part of their regular duties: • Strongly agree / Agree = 36% e. The time teachers spend on extracurricular activities should be recognized through additional pay or time-off: • Strongly agree / Agree = 60% f. Teachers should be paid on the basis of merit: • Strongly agree / Agree = 36% g. Kindergarten should be extended to a full day: • Strongly agree / Agree = 30% h. Kindergarten should be mandatory: • Strongly agree / Agree = 74% i. Kindergarten should be extended to full days for special needs children: • Strongly agree / Agree = 33% j. The length of the school year or school day should be increased: • Strongly agree / Agree = 11% k. Alberta should set a maximum for the number of students in the classroom, especially for the lower grades: • Strongly agree / Agree = 83% l. Alberta's school boards and schools should have flexibility in deciding how many students are in each classroom: • Strongly agree / Agree = 34% m. Class size is less important than the composition and needs of students in the classroom: • Strongly agree / Agree = 43% n. More training should be provided for teacher aides and assistants: • Strongly agree / Agree = 71%
10. What barriers or obstacles need to be overcome in order to achieve excellence in the classroom?	Class composition • to achieve excellence, class size should be reduced, and class composition should be considered • a classroom of large-ranging learning abilities can hinder excellence • full integration of students into the classroom disrupts the classroom environment • reduction of mild/moderate special needs, ESL and behaviorally challenged students in the classroom • abandon mainstreaming or streaming • encourage/facilitate more one-on-one instruction and small group work

Question	Identified Key Themes
	Funding • funding should be increased, particularly at the school level • increased funding for special needs and particularly for materials, resources, textbooks • provision of a stable and flexible funding formula would meet diversified needs • current per-capita funding in smaller schools can hinder their ability to provide diversified learning environments and alternative curricula/programs • limited funding impacts the advancement of special needs students • current funding does not account for the renovation of old schools, the expansion of current schools, or the building of new school facilities Increase staff numbers • increasing staff numbers (through, in part, increased funding) would make it possible to address the diverse needs of a larger subsection of the student population • if special needs students continue to be integrated in the classroom more support should be provided to the classroom (resources or especially teachers' aides) • new teachers should be attracted to the profession through promotion of the teaching profession as a secure and rewarding career choice and the development of incentives • increasing support staff is also necessary to encourage the achievement of excellence in the classroom
11. Schools are expected to meet the needs of a diverse range of students in their classrooms. Circle 1 if you strongly agree and 5 if you strongly disagree with the following statements.	a. Students with special needs should be included in the classroom: • Strongly agree / Agree = 23% b. Classes with special needs students should be smaller than other classes: • Strongly agree / Agree = 90% c. More support should be provided for students and teachers in classes with special needs students: • Strongly agree / Agree = 93% d. Schools and teachers should have more support from social, health, and community agencies: • Strongly agree / Agree = 83% e. Teachers need more support in assessing and addressing learning needs: • Strongly agree / Agree = 84% f. Teachers need more support in addressing behaviour problems of students in school: • Strongly agree / Agree = 90% g. More needs to be done to address the needs of Aboriginal students: • Strongly agree / Agree = 58% h. Additional support should be provided for students who are new to Canada: • Strongly agree / Agree = 74% i. Students who are gifted or talented don't get the opportunities they need: • Strongly agree / Agree = 44%

Question	Identified Key Themes
12. What other things should be done in Alberta schools to address the diverse needs of students?	Special Needs Students • majority of students are receiving less value from the education system due to the redirection of funding and resources to special needs students • segregation of special needs students into separate classrooms • if mixed learning to continue, additional resources are needed, including: - specially trained teachers and teachers' aides - access to specialists (physical therapists, counsellors, speech pathologists, etc.) - access to additional computers, desks, chairs Funding • increased funding vital to continuity of learning system • areas identified for additional funds: - funding pertaining to special needs students - funding pertaining to student needs, such as language training, basic educational supplies, technology, infrastructure, extracurricular activities and academic and vocational training - alternative learning environments - professionals (such as counsellors) Teachers and teacher aides • documents also emphasized the role of teachers and teachers' aides: - additional staff (teachers, aides, and support staff) - training and professional development - increased support within the classroom - more prep time for teachers Student needs • increased curriculum flexibility to allow for more adaptation to changing student needs • early assessment to ascertain student needs and appropriate academic placement • increase in the availability in vocational training • increase cultural awareness and sensitivity to support diversity • specialized programs for gifted learners • availability and quality of basic educational supplies • adequate lunch programs to fulfill daily nutritional requirements • increased access to extracurricular activities System • a variety of changes or improvements can be made to the educational system in order to make it more effective: - curriculum (language training, flexibility, vocational training, and other related issues - specialized programs to return to foundations of Christian morals - social skills development, including tolerance, respect, appropriate behaviours

Question	Identified Key Themes
13. What should be done to address the needs of students who do not qualify for special needs funding but need more time and attention to address their needs?	Funding • importance of revising the criteria that outline funding procedures to meet the needs of non-funded students • funding criteria should be expanded to include more diverse categories of special needs. For example, mild and moderate special needs students should be accommodated by revising the funding formula to incorporate their needs • the need for "more" and "equitable" funding Increase Staff Numbers • increasing staff numbers within schools would allow for more time and attention for students. Specific areas for increased staff numbers included: - teachers' aides - specialists and external experts (e.g. psychologists, learning strategists, etc.) - support staff - more teachers - resource teachers - special education teacher Classroom composition • composition often linked with the amount of individualized attention received by learners • class sizes too large to accommodate needs of non-funded special needs students • learning environments could be maximized through a reduction in the number of non-funded special needs students in the classroom

Question	Identified Key Themes
14. The content of what students learn in the classroom should be up to date and reflect changes in knowledge and in our society. How important do you consider the following factors?	a. Curriculum should anticipate the changing needs of the workforce and ensure that students are well-prepared: Strongly agree / Agree = 74% b. Curriculum should be updated on a regular cycle so teachers know when the changes are coming: Strongly agree / Agree = 74% c. Significant changes to the curriculum should be minimized: Strongly agree / Agree = 57% d. The curriculum should focus on basic skills: Strongly agree / Agree = 69% e. There should be a limit on the number of optional courses provided: Strongly agree / Agree = 34% f. The curriculum is overloaded and students are expected to cover too much in a year: Strongly agree / Agree = 56% g. The curriculum is not challenging students enough: Strongly agree / Agree = 13% h. Technology should be used as a tool to enhance the teaching and learning in all courses: Strongly agree / Agree = 62% i. Learning second languages should be mandatory: Strongly agree / Agree = 38% j. Physical education should be mandatory for all grades: Strongly agree / Agree = 80% k. Life skills programs should be mandatory: Strongly agree / Agree = 73% l. Students should learn a greater appreciation for the arts and culture: Strongly agree / Agree = 66% m. Students should learn more Canadian history: Strongly agree / Agree = 70% n. Students should get a good understanding of other cultures and traditions: Strongly agree / Agree = 74% o. Students should learn more about the environment and its impact on our province, country, and the world: Strongly agree / Agree = 79% p. Schools should have additional funding to purchase new texts and learning resources when new curriculum is introduced: Strongly agree / Agree = 93%

Question	Identified Key Themes
15. What other things should be done to the curriculum to ensure that students in Alberta get the best education?	**Design and content of the curriculum** • design of the curriculum in terms of the need for it to be age appropriate, relevant, and responsive to the needs of individual students • highlighted the need to focus on the basics, which generally were reading, writing and arithmetic • identified the need for students to develop or be taught a number of "soft skills," including critical thinking, respect, tolerance and skills needed to live from day to day (e.g. financial management) • students should be taught how to learn, rather than just learning facts • emphasis should be given to specific subjects, such as social studies, physical education, and the environment, and new subjects • the quantity of content in the curriculum can be overwhelming for students **Implementation and delivery of the curriculum** • the need for sufficient numbers of resources to be available when changes are implemented • the need for teachers to receive in-servicing and professional development prior to implementation of new curricula • the involvement of the community in the education of a student • the need for smaller class sizes to help students **Preparations for the impact of globalization** • "international study," including the study of the history and culture of other countries, the challenges faced by them, religion, international relations, international trade • the study of a second or third language • travel or exchange programs to or with other countries • adding or emphasizing current events **Process for changing curriculum** • process for changing the curriculum, including the timing and numbers of changes • involvement of teachers in this process
16. One of the important roles of schools is to prepare students for further education and the workforce. What are the most important ways of ensuring smooth transitions from schools to post-secondary education and jobs?	a. Help students make transitions from school to post-secondary education and on to their careers: • Very important / important = 81% b. Encourage more students to begin trades training in school so they can continue on in apprenticeships: • Very important / important = 73% c. Teach students the kinds of attitudes and skills they'll need in the workplace: • Very important / important = 62% d. Provide mentorship programs and other approaches to expand students' awareness of different careers: • Very important / important = 57% e. Encourage students to stay-in-school through innovative programs and approaches: • Very important / important = 82% f. Expand partnerships between schools and business, industry, and labour groups: • Very important / important = 63% g. Take innovative approaches like schools in malls: • Very important / important = 23% h. Encourage community members to be more involved in schools: • Very important / important = 70%

Question	Identified Key Themes
17. What things need to be changed in the post-secondary system to enhance smooth transitions?	Communication • importance of communication between secondary and post-secondary system • importance of communication between above and Alberta Learning to promote transitions • includes: - information sharing - collaboration on high school curriculum - articulation of post-secondary expectations - applied math should be permitted for post-secondary entry • facilitate transitions between high school and post-secondary education through guest speakers, visits to campuses, and other programs to make attending post-secondary less intimidating Affordability / Accessibility • funding earmarked for tuition reduction • funding for special needs students • funding for guidance/career counselling services • lower tuition fees to remove barriers for all qualified students • too much international recruitment • lack of seats due to lack of funding and unreasonable entrance requirements Foundations - Life Skills and Teaching the Basics • life skills and/or 'real world skills' should be taught in high school • smooth transitions are not occurring because students do not have a good grasp of the basics (reading, writing, and math) or a foundation of social skills and values Parental Involvement and Responsibility • support from home is required to help students make successful transitions • it is the role of the parents, and not the learning system, to prepare their children for what lies ahead Quality Programs • need for high standards in secondary and post-secondary systems, in terms of entrance requirements and curriculum • need for smaller classes, work experience programs (including cooperative programs and internships), and seamless curriculum

Question	Identified Key Themes
18. What steps should be taken to ensure that young children are ready for school when they enter Grade 1?	**Kindergarten** • mandatory kindergarten • graduated kindergarten system (prepares children over a two-year period) • full day kindergarten • standardized kindergarten curriculum **School Preparation** • involves social system of educators, parents, community services, and children • early intervention (e.g. success by age 6, Head-start programs) • early literacy (Includes library program and parents reading to children) • basic skills (such as tying shoes, sitting still, listening to others, basic numbers, etc.) • preschool • readiness and assessment (use of assessments to test readiness and identify learning and other disabilities) **Parent Preparation** documents identified four broad categories of ways in which parents can become involved with the education of their children: • parent education • parent responsibility • parent involvement • parenting course **Age Related Themes** • earlier cut-off date • raising entrance age • consistent start age **Funding** • funded preschool / daycare • home parent support (tax incentives, social benefits) • increased funding for entire system

Question	Identified Key Themes
19. What should be done to ensure smooth transitions as students move from grade to grade? How should decisions be made about whether or not students move on to the next grade - based on age, based on their knowledge and skills, or based on a combination of factors?	Improving grade to grade transition • communication: between teachers, between schools and parents, between schools, and between new students and teachers Assisting students who are not performing at grade level • form of remediation for students struggling to reach grade level (e.g. summer school) • special programs for students with special needs • modification to the curriculum to enhance its accessibility to struggling students Providing general improvements to the education system • small class size • student streaming • increased time for teacher collaboration • increased funding Promotional criteria • student promotion based on: - educational criteria - knowledge/skills in conjunction with one or more other criteria - demonstration of basic skills - academic achievement, grades, academic performance Age • transitions according to age, usually in combination with some other criteria such as skills, maturity, attitude, health, etc. Combination • a combination of those decisions highlighted above Promotional decisions • promotion unique to each student and done in his/her best interest **Other themes** Transition/Promotion decisions • parents and school together • teacher's decision only • parents' decision only, in conjunction with their children Retention guidelines • need for retention guidelines and their implementation Impacts Concerns about the harmful impacts of social promotion: • students will have to earn their rewards once they leave school - promoting them without merit in school is a poor grounding for later life • social promotion just pushes the problems onward, and creates larger problems later; it is failing students and society and sets a person up for later failure • students graduate unable to read

Question	Identified Key Themes
20. A number of issues have been raised about how our schools are governed and managed. What do you think of the following ideas?	a. The number of school boards should be reduced: • Strongly agree / Agree = 19% b. The relationship between the government, school boards, the ATA, principals, school councils, superintendents and teachers is unclear and needs to be reviewed: • Strongly agree / Agree = 36% c. Superintendents shouldn't have to be certified teachers as long as they are good managers and leaders: • Strongly agree / Agree = 10% d. Superintendents can be effective leaders without possessing a teaching certificate or without having been a teacher: • Strongly agree / Agree = 15% e. School principals should continue to be members of the ATA: • Strongly agree / Agree = 53% f. The role of school councils should be expanded: • Strongly agree / Agree = 21%
21. What other aspects of the current way schools are governed and managed should be addressed and what options would you suggest? What should be the roles and responsibilities of the provincial government, Alberta Teachers' Association, school boards, school councils, principals, superintendents and teachers?	Funding • adequate funding is needed in order for Alberta to have a first class system • education is a high priority and the government should be responsible for the overall curriculum, the School Act, testing of students, and all other aspects of the learning system • the importance of not running education as one would a business • restore board taxing power Decision Making • decisions should be made at the school level because it is the teachers and principals that really know what is going on in schools • competent trustees are needed who will distribute funding fairly and objectively and have a true interest in education • teacher accountability is critical to children's education; teachers should be competent and love what they do and be given the time to teach • principals and superintendents should be accountable to parents, teachers and the community and spend time actually teaching • superintendents must be educators Improving the education system • different stakeholder groups should work cooperatively for the betterment of education • educators and not politicians are needed to improve the system. This included the belief that teachers and principals are the ones that really know what is going on in the classroom and are not consulted enough by those who make decisions on education • politicians and superintendents should spend time in schools to really understand what is happening there and what is required Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) • the ATA should be a professional organization with voluntary membership similar to lawyers and doctors • the ATA is needed and does a good job of representing teachers and looking after their rights

Question	Identified Key Themes
22. It's important to ensure that the education system is sustainable in the future. Resources are limited. Should the following ideas be considered in terms of funding the education system?	a. School boards should be able to tax their local residents: Strongly agree / Agree = 44% b. More funding should come from the province: Strongly agree / Agree = 92% c. The province should put more priority on education and spend less in other areas: Strongly agree / Agree = 84% d. New sources of revenue should be considered such as foundations where community members could contribute to support specific projects: Strongly agree / Agree = 54% e. People should be prepared to pay more in taxes to support education: Strongly agree / Agree = 53% f. Public-private partnerships should be considered as a way of paying for new schools: Strongly agree / Agree = 31% g. Fund-raising should be limited to "extras" and not be used to cover the costs of operating the school or textbooks: Strongly agree / Agree = 54% h. Schools should eliminate the 'frills,' concentrate on the core essentials: Strongly agree / Agree = 21% i. Extras should be funded by parents: Strongly agree / Agree = 31% j. Schools should be more accountable for how they spend public funds: Strongly agree / Agree = 43% k. All funding for education should come from the general revenues of the province: Strongly agree / Agree = 58% l. Public and separate schools should share facilities in order to reduce costs of building new schools: Strongly agree / Agree = 39% m. Additional funding should be provided to expand technology in schools: Strongly agree / Agree = 69%
23. If additional dollars were to be invested in Alberta's education system, decisions would need to be made on their allocation. What percentage of any new funding would you invest?	Please refer to Table 2.

Question	Identified Key Themes
24. What other ideas do you have for funding education and making sure it is sustainable in the future?	**Funding - adequate, stable or more funding** • treat education as a priority/investment in the future • provide adequate/increased funding • fund education from general revenues • do not base funding on oil prices • more funding from federal government **School boards, classrooms and teachers** • local taxation and decision making • reduce class size • special needs - more funding and help for students with special needs • value of technology and online learning **Revenue generation** • create education funds: education lottery fund (echoing those used by hospital foundations, for instance); education trust fund (modelled after the Alberta Heritage Fund); or an education stabilization fund • use the Heritage Fund for education • fundraising by parents and schools • use Gaming and Liquor revenues for education • increase taxes **Accountability** • government and school board accountability (includes poor management of funds; waste and mismanagement; and the need for decision-makers to be held accountable for decisions) • reduce administration, particularly in the public school system **Role of Business** • corporate involvement (private-public partnerships) • corporate sponsorship and/or donations • corporate funding and taxation (taxing businesses to further fund education)

Question	Identified Key Themes
25. What steps should be taken to reduce current and future inequities between rural and urban schools?	Funding • improvements to the funding formula • increased funds for rural communities • funding for special needs • increase overall system funding • funding redistribution with a focus on urban or rural communities Technology • improving technology, the internet, and virtual education to reduce rural/urban inequities • includes use of computers, online access, trade related equipment and communications systems Taxation • educational taxation reform - taxation monies should not be pooled, but should rather not leave the area from which they are collected - increase corporate tax rate and reallocate these specific fund to help fund increasing education costs - return to earlier taxation formula • allow local school boards to levy an additional tax within their jurisdiction Distance learning • related to increasing level of available technology • use of technology to provide a more comprehensive distance learning alternative • distance learning to be used as a supplemental resource to improve access to specialized programs and information • distance learning as the primary education source for isolated students System evaluation • evaluation of the system needs to occur prior to any discussion of the rural/urban educational inequities • areas requiring closer examination and evaluation include: - funding - transportation - special needs - resource allocation - school boards - teacher remuneration Transportation • separate transportation expenses from education budget to ensure education funds are used for educational purposes only • increased transportation funding for field trips and other school related activities Consolidating Schools • consolidation of schools and programs in rural districts to allow for greater access to a wider variety of programs

Question	Identified Key Themes
26. What other issues or ideas should the Commission address as part of its review?	**Funding** • increased government spending on education • the government is more than able to increase current funding levels for the education system • additional funding is also needed to operationalize and implement curriculum changes **Teacher-Related** • teachers' value and support - the need for greater value and respect for the teaching profession from government, the public, parents, etc. • teachers' attraction and retention • teachers' health & well-being - concerns related to teacher burnout and lack of supports for their physical and mental health • teachers' recognition of prep time and extra-curricular work • teachers' salaries - to encourage attraction into the profession **Private/Public & Public/Separate** • support/promote separate system - emphasis on Catholic schools • increase funding for private schools • increase funding to allow survival of affordable, public education • reduce/eliminate funding private schools - focus on private versus public schooling **Education as Priority** • government should better recognize the value of the education system in order for the province to remain prosperous and to develop a capable and responsible society • education is a valuable investment • the provision of quality education is a societal obligation **Learning Commission** • concerns with Commission and Commission workbooks • Commission a misuse of taxpayer resources • Commission has already pre-determined answers to its questions prior to public consultation • answers to these issues so common sense, a Commission is not needed • general distrust of the public consultation process • the format of the workbook had been structured so that results could be skewed or respondents could be led to make certain conclusions • government must be prepared to act on the results of the Commission **Schools Conditions** • support to special needs programming • more educational assistants/teachers aides for special needs students • schools' class size • schools' classroom conditions - resources, infrastructure, physical space, etc.

Attachment 1

Workbook Analysis

Total Submissions Received:	**15,865**
Submitted Online:	**8,800**
Entered into system:	**7,065 (mailed to Commission offices)**

SUBMISSION TYPE (as identified by respondents):

Total Organization / Company Submissions	293	(1.9%)
Total Individual Submissions:	10932	(70.6%)
Total Unknown Submissions:	4265	(27.5%)

DEMOGRAPHICS (of those in system to date):

Total YES responses to children in Kindergarten to Grade 12 in AB:	6256	(58.3%)
Total NO responses to children in Kindergarten to Grade 12 in AB:	4471	(41.7%)

Total 18 and under:	1106	(11.0%)
Total 19 - 24:	333	(3.3%)
Total 25 - 34:	1738	(17.3%)
Total 35 - 44:	3141	(31.2%)
Total 45 - 54:	2902	(28.9%)
Total 55 - 64:	703	(7.0%)
Total 65 - 74:	105	(1.0%)
Total 75 and over:	27	(0.3%)

Number of Respondents who Identified themselves as:

• Teacher	4277	(27%)
• Parent	6242	(39%)
• Business Owner	582	(3.7%)
• Taxpayer	5087	(32%)
• Community Organization	254	(1.6%)
• Citizen	130	(0.8%)

WORKBOOK SUBMISSIONS:

Total Question 1 Submissions	13176	(83.1%)
Total Question 26 Submissions	6998	(44.1%)
Average Response Rate	11046	(70%)

RESPONDENT CATEGORIES

Total Organization/Company Submissions:	315	(2.0%)
Total Individual Submissions:	11239	(70.8%)
Total Unknown Submissions:	4311	(27.2%)

Table 1

Question 8

Survey Responses **15,865**
Question Responses **12,645 (79.7%)**

There are a number of factors that affect excellence in the classroom.
What priority would you give to the follow factors?
Please rank them in priority of 1 - 10 with 1 being the highest priority.

Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	N/A
Effective leadership by the principal	1,586 13.4%	1,279 10.8%	1,976 16.7%	1,808 15.3%	1,604 13.6%	1,436 12.1%	900 7.6%	639 5.4%	334 2.8%	262 2.2%	11,824 100.0%	4041
Fewer students in the classroom	5,028 40.2%	3,240 25.9%	1,414 11.3%	834 6.7%	540 4.3%	406 3.2%	345 2.8%	236 1.9%	220 1.8%	253 2.0%	12,516 100.0%	3349
Well-trained and effective teachers	6,034 49.3%	3,384 27.6%	1,352 11.0%	510 4.2%	383 3.1%	156 1.3%	100 0.8%	89 0.7%	81 0.7%	154 1.3%	12,243 100.0%	3622
Access to more support from education experts and counselors to assess and meet students' needs	719 6.1%	842 7.1%	1,570 13.3%	1,745 14.7%	1,827 15.4%	1,708 14.4%	1,397 11.8%	971 8.2%	696 5.9%	358 3.0%	11,833 100.0%	4032
Better networks of support outside the school including family counselors, social agencies and health authorities	491 4.2%	418 3.6%	710 6.1%	1,059 9.1%	1,596 13.7%	1,865 16.0%	1,900 16.3%	1,655 14.2%	1,163 10.0%	826 7.1%	11,683 100.0%	4182
Adequate facilities and equipment such as text books, computers, etc.	1,044 8.5%	1,799 14.7%	2,731 22.3%	2,463 20.1%	1,681 13.7%	1,176 9.6%	666 5.4%	402 3.3%	187 1.5%	101 0.8%	12,250 100.0%	3615
More classroom time for students	372 3.3%	316 2.8%	410 3.7%	508 4.6%	624 5.6%	610 5.5%	788 7.1%	1,115 10.0%	2,128 19.1%	4,274 38.3%	11,145 100.0%	4720
Extra-curricular activities	277 2.5%	200 1.8%	252 2.2%	338 3.0%	658 5.9%	752 6.7%	1,194 10.7%	1,927 17.2%	2,797 25.0%	2,807 25.1%	11,202 100.0%	4663
More active involvement of parents	646 5.7%	574 5.0%	832 7.3%	968 8.5%	1,195 10.5%	1,256 11.0%	1,701 14.9%	1,804 15.8%	1,412 12.4%	995 8.7%	11,383 100.0%	4482
High standards in the curriculum	725 6.4%	753 6.6%	917 8.1%	1,119 9.9%	1,359 12.0%	1,267 11.2%	1,467 12.9%	1,608 14.2%	1,255 11.1%	873 7.7%	11,343 100.0%	4522

Table 2

Question 23

Survey Responses	**15,865**	
Question Responses	**9,715**	**(61.2%)**

If additional dollars were to be invested in Alberta's education system, decision would need to be made on their allocation. What percentage of any new funding would you invest to:

	Average Share
Reduce the number of students in classrooms	27.9%
Provide additional supports for special needs students	10.8%
Enhance students' access to technology	6.5%
Increase salaries and benefits for teachers and other school staff	10.3%
Hire more teaching assistants	7.4%
Provide schools with additional funding for resources like textbooks and enhances school libraries	9.7%
Increase access to counseling services in schools	4.8%
Offer more supports to help students build numeracy skills	5.6%
Offer more supports to help students build literacy skills	7.2%
Provide additional resources to improve and address curriculum changes	5.2%
Other	4.6%
Total	**100.0%**

Student Consultations Final Report

Consultations with youth were organized and facilitated by GPC International. The following is their report on the ideas and themes raised by students involved in the consultation process.

1.0 Introduction

Alberta's Commission on Learning was established to complete a review of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system in the province of Alberta. This review, the first of its kind in 30 years, will result in a series of recommendations to the Alberta Learning Minister. Since its inception in June 2002, the Commission has been working to solicit feedback from all Albertans who are stakeholders to the education system. As part of this work, the Commission established a separate process to ensure quality input from representatives of students in the system.

GPC conducted full day consultation sessions with students in Grande Prairie on February 19 and Calgary on February 21. The objective of the sessions was to obtain feedback directly from current and recent high school students about their own experiences in, and recommendations for, the education system in the province. Specifically the consultation sessions sought student input about preparation for steps after high school, and about teachers, subjects and the overall learning environment.

1.1 Recruitment and Participation

Students for these sessions were recruited through the local public and separate school districts, private schools and post-secondary colleges. At each location, 60 students were invited to attend. In Grande Prairie, 56 students were invited and 51 attended. In Calgary, 62 students were invited and 58 attended.

For high school students, recruitment was done through school or school board administrators. The school contacts were specifically asked to send a representative sample of grade 12 students to the consultation session. GPC gave specific directions that the school not purposefully pick the top students, and that ESL and special needs students be included. However, in both cities, but more so in Calgary, it quickly became evident that the majority of students were high performers. They were extremely articulate and confident in expressing their opinions in a group setting. They had strong ideas about their future plans, and strong opinions about the questions put before them during the consultation. There were a few special needs students in each city, and a number of ESL students in the Calgary session. College students were recruited through direct contact with institution administrators.

GPC agrees with the assessment of some of the participants, and of the commissioners who were present at the session, that the selection of the participants did not represent the full spectrum of graduating high school students, and recommends that the Commission pursue other avenues to reach and talk with some lower performing students, in order to present a more complete picture of student input. An approach other than formal consultation might be considered.

Students were divided into three equal groups, and each group worked with one facilitator for the full day. A combination of open, facilitated discussion, large and small group exercises, and informal presentations, was used to engage the students in the topic. Rather than simply following the key topic areas outlined by the Commission, the sessions asked students about their expectations of high school, their direct experiences, and their recommendations. Within each of these discussion areas, students were asked to consider teachers, subjects and skills, and their classmates, as well as guidance counsellors, other mentors, and sources of information and preparation for graduates' next steps.

1.2 Key Discussion Areas

The consultation sessions were designed to elicit students' opinions, experiences and ideas related to six of the seven key areas identified by Alberta's Commission on Learning:

- Excellence in the Classroom
- The Changing Student
- Expectations and Results
- Smooth Transitions
- Relevant and Responsive Curriculum
- Future Classrooms (technology only)

The seventh area, governance and responsibility, was not included because it was deemed to be beyond the scope of students' experiences.

Students were asked to discuss and share their thoughts on their expectations of what high school was preparing them for; their actual experiences in high school; and their recommendations for improvement. A number of different facilitation techniques were used, and the students' responses were summarized by facilitators into the key topic areas.

2.0 Main Themes

Comparing the results of the facilitation sessions with the Alberta Commission on Learning's key topic areas, facilitators agreed that overall, the students were most interested in, and concerned about three specific areas:

- How high school was helping them be prepared to make decisions about their next steps;
- The role, availability, preparedness and commitment of teachers, and
- The scope and breadth of courses available to students.

Transitions

Throughout the day, the topic of making the transition from high school to next steps came up repeatedly. For the majority of students, some kind of post-secondary education, whether it is college or university, seemed to be in the future. A few students in both Calgary and Grande Prairie had specific plans for trades training and apprenticeships, and a few Grande Prairie students were considering immediately joining the workforce in the oil and gas sector.

However, students had many concerns and suggestions related to the role of high school in preparing them for next steps.

Without exception, students felt that guidance counsellors were in short supply, and did not have adequate information or first-hand knowledge to present all of the available options to students. Many students felt they were pushed, by counsellors and other influencers, towards post-secondary education as the only viable 'first choice'. Students felt strongly that school is a place that needs to help them make connections to post-secondary students and representatives, as well as people already working in various career areas, in order to help them understand the options available. They suggested that schools provide more connections between the 'outside' world and the student body, through career fairs, trips to colleges, universities and workplaces, and even short work term or student and job shadowing opportunities. Students also suggested student help-lines to increase access to knowledgeable career counsellors.

Students also felt that schools could do much more to help them become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and use that information to make wise career choices. They suggested peer support groups, personality testing options and more one-on-one time with key influencers to investigate these topics further.

Teachers

Teachers play a central role in shaping students' high school experiences and their perceptions about next steps. As such, it is not surprising that the topic of teachers was a recurrent theme throughout the day.

Although students understood the constraints on the system, they identified class size as an issue. In several groups, students agreed that while small class size was preferable for a high school learning environment, this kind of atmosphere also sheltered them from the realities of post-secondary education. Students had several recommendations:
- supplying more teachers to allow for smaller classes;
- separating ESL, special needs, and pure vs. applied stream students into separate classrooms;
- increasing class size but improving teachers' ability to manage larger classes;
- providing teachers' aides for increased teacher capacity;
- and providing more structured tutorial or study session time during the school day to promote individual interaction with teachers.

Students also felt that their learning was inhibited by the fact that teachers are not always subject matter experts in the area in which they teach. This was a more significant issue in Grande Prairie than in Calgary. But perhaps students' largest concern with teachers was that they do not have the passion or motivation to provide a truly innovative learning environment for students.

Recommendations to address concerns related to teachers included providing more professional development for teachers, finding new ways to provide incentives for teachers, and having meaningful student evaluations of teachers on a regular basis.

Curriculum

The most compelling theme from discussions relating to curriculum involved the need for the inclusion of more 'life and academic skills' courses in schools. While students well understood the need for academic core courses, they felt that skills ranging from debating and presentations, listening, decision making, team work, relationship and communication skills, and personal financial planning, should be added to the curriculum. These comments stemmed from the students' belief that the role of high school is to prepare them for independent living. As such, they suggested that in addition to teaching the academic 'basics', schools have a large role to play in teaching youth to become adults.

Within discussions of curriculum, students focused mainly on the Career and Life Management (CALM) course. Most students thought some kind of career and life skills course was necessary, and in fact, should be expanded. Virtually all students felt the current curriculum was irrelevant, out-dated, and generally not useful. Students also pointed out that they need schools to better explain the different career streams that are related to choosing to take applied versus pure courses,. They added that schools need to work to break down the stigma that applied courses and the Career Technology Studies (CTS) stream are for less intelligent students who have no choice but to pursue a trade. Related to these comments, many students felt there should be more flexibility within the curriculum to allow students to experiment more. Students would like the opportunity to be taking both academic stream and trades stream courses at the same time, and did not like the fact that they had to choose between these two possible futures so early in their academic careers.

Students also suggested they needed the opportunity for more hands-on learning, where they could immediately apply the knowledge gained from lectures and text books.

3.0 Detailed Topic Discussions

3.1 Excellence in the Classroom

Discussion in this area focused on teacher preparation and knowledge, and on class size.

Grande Prairie

Discussion

Students noted that there is considerable variability in teacher knowledge, preparation and skill level, both between individual teachers, and among different schools. It was also noted that teachers often struggle with the amount of subject matter they are expected to 'cram' into available class time.

Students commented that while teachers are knowledgeable about subject areas, their knowledge isn't always relevant to students. In some cases, teachers who are knowledgeable in subject matters in one area are teaching in another area. This was seen as detrimental to both the students and the teachers.

Students also commented on teachers' skills and abilities. Comments included:
- teacher passion and ability to motivate students is more important than subject matter expertise;
- teachers are not prepared for the demands of larger classrooms;
- Some teachers, either because of pressure or disinterest, take a limited approach to teaching and don't vary their methods.

Growing class size was identified as a problem that affects teaching quality and learning ability. However, students recognized that simply getting more teachers might not be possible. One group felt that although small class sizes were good for learning, they sheltered students from the reality they face in larger post-secondary institutions. As such, large classes can provide a good experience for students preparing for post-secondary education.

Recommendations

Teachers:

- Teachers need to be subject matter experts to be able to help students properly prepare for diploma exams;
- Teachers need training to be more creative in their teaching and evaluation techniques;
- Teachers need to help students learn a wider skill range in order to meet student needs, including organizational skills, critical thinking skills, and managing through ethical scenarios; and
- Teachers should be rewarded for extra-curricular activities and other good work in order to motivate them.

Class Size:

- Teachers should be taught to manage larger classrooms better;
- Principals need the ability to assess proper class size as circumstances dictate, depending on teacher ability and subject matter, rather than working towards some kind of average class size; and
- Rather than reducing class size, add teachers' aides to classes to provide individual attention as required.

Calgary

Discussion

In public schools, students felt that teacher preparation was inadequate and in many cases, teachers were not working in their area of expertise. Other students commented that while teachers may have subject area knowledge, they are not well prepared in terms of presentation skills and teaching methods. It was also pointed out that teachers are not up-to-date in terms of post-secondary and career options, and not knowledgeable in assisting students to become more self-aware.

For the most part, class sizes were seen as too large, although there were comments that students could take responsibility to reach out for help when they need it. Some commented that small class sizes did not prepare them for post-secondary learning situations. Others felt that teachers are not available enough to students outside of class time.

Recommendations

Teachers:

- There should be more respect between teachers and students;
- Teachers need to be innovative and passionate;
- Teachers should share best practices and apply them;
- Teachers should connect the curriculum to life beyond high school - explain how topics are relevant in the real world; and
- Teachers should be subject to mandatory evaluations that could lead to a position change, reprimand or motivator for teachers. Teachers should be evaluated by students.

Class size:

- Class sizes should be smaller.

3.2 The Changing Student

English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and applied courses versus pure courses were the main issues discussed under this topic area.

Grande Prairie

Discussion

Students felt that classes that combine applied and pure levels (30 and 33, or 20 and 23) were problematic because the teacher could not meet the varying needs of all of the students in the class.

Students did not mention the role their parents or families played, until they were directly asked. When asked, some said they believe that parents should play a decreasing role as students get closer to graduation, in order to encourage independence. Others suggested that because grade 12 is such a turning point, parents need to be more involved in education and decisions made by students at this time.

Recommendations

- More one-on-time with teachers should be made available for all students, whether through an increase in the number of teachers, or the addition of teachers' aides.

Calgary

Discussion

It was pointed out that ESL students have great difficulty keeping up in regular classrooms, and that combining applied and pure courses into one room made it difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all. However, some students commented that separating ESL, International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement and other 'special program' students was problematic because these students did not fully develop social skills from mixing with the general student population.

One student presented a strong viewpoint on the inadequacy of on-reserve schools for native students. She felt that native students attending on-reserve schools were severely disadvantaged because of the lack of resources and the poor preparation and skills of teachers.

Recommendations

- Applied and pure students should be separated into different classrooms (30;33);
- Improve the effectiveness of ESL programs by extending ESL 5 to all schools; and
- ESL students should have special classes or special sessions as they have great difficulty keeping up with students in the regular classroom setting.

3.3 Smooth Transitions

Students discussed their future plans and concerns, as well as the role of counsellors, teachers and others in helping them choose options. There was considerable discussion, as well, about the types of additional information that students should be able to access.

Grand Prairie

Discussion

Many students don't have a clear idea of what they will do after high school, although most expect it will involve some form of further education. In one group, virtually all the students were planning on some kind of post-secondary education, including trade apprenticeships. A few students felt that immediately joining the oil and gas sector workforce was a viable option, based on the fact that their parents had excelled in this sector with no post-secondary education. There was concern expressed about the following:

- Not having enough money (either for school, or, as the result of making a poor career choice);
- Job security;
- Lack of peer support;
- Finding challenging work; and
- Making the move to post secondary education.

Students felt guidance counsellors were generally helpful, but that there were not enough of them to meet students' needs. There was concern that counsellors did not have enough information on the various options open to graduating students. Specific examples included counsellors not knowing enough about school and careers outside of their own experience; not promoting options like the trades, college or fine arts, or having a bias in terms of perceiving trades as 'male oriented.' Additionally, it was felt that counsellors need to be more realistic about individual students' options, but need to be encouraging at the same time.

Students would like guidance outside of academic areas, such as planning for graduation and future education.

It was also pointed out that a particular teacher, with whom a student develops a relationship, is often a better source of information than a guidance counsellor with whom the student does not have a relationship.

Recommendations

Counsellors:

- Increase the number of guidance counsellors and make them more proactive;
- Establish student help-lines to increase access;
- Individual students could also take responsibility for getting information and help;
- Increase the range of options that counsellors present to students by ensuring that counsellors have access to that information, for example: travelling or working abroad, as well as post-secondary opportunities outside of Alberta; and
- Counsellors should provide support and advice beyond academic - drug and alcohol support, stress management, health and fitness.

Other Advisors:

- Teachers need more knowledge about post-secondary options and career choices for students;
- Parents and other mentors need to help to give students real-world advice;
- Students need to be able to spend more time with counsellors and other influencers to learn what is possible for them personally; and
- Mentors need to be more encouraging.

Information:

- Schools should provide more in the way of open houses, job shadowing, career fairs and job site tours;
- Recent grads could come back to share their experiences with current students;
- Schools could help students get access to local professionals or current post-secondary students;
- Students would like help in learning non-academic skills such as interview skills, working independently and managing stress;
- Students need information on financing education options;
- More information on schools, financing, apprenticeships could be made available on web sites, and, students should be taught how to access this information on the Internet;
- Mass media advertising could be used to provide more information about school options and financing of education; and
- Students felt that they needed to start talking about next steps much earlier than in grade 12.

Calgary

Discussion

Students expect high school to prepare them for both further education, and life skills. Most students said they expected to go to some kind of post-secondary education. Very few mentioned trades, and in one group, trades was seen as a second-class option for those who couldn't make it into university. There was a feeling that the prevailing approach was to steer students towards university, and not enough information is being made available, or support given, to students interested in trades. There were also concerns expressed about students being able to fund their education, failing at school or jobs, making poor career choices, and losing peer support.

Students felt strongly that schools did not have enough guidance counsellors, that available counsellors were not adequately prepared, or lacked appropriate and current information. In addition, some students believed that while counsellors do their best, they lack the proper information and do not have enough time/resources to deal effectively with individual students. As a result, students commented, counsellors do not provide a broad enough range of options. It was also pointed out that at schools with large ESL populations, counsellors do not have appropriate language skills.

Students felt they needed more help with all kinds of post-high school decisions, including dealing with university applications and financing post-secondary study.

More access to people with experience in career areas of interest to students was seen as extremely important.

Recommendations

Counsellors:

- Schools need more guidance counsellors with more up to date and broader knowledge regarding university, trades, colleges, and working and studying abroad;
- Students need to be proactive and take responsibility for their own destiny. Schools can help by encouraging independence, but providing information about the options available;
- Students would like help with setting goals;
- Counsellors should provide more information on job hunting and career planning;
- Counsellors should provide academic 'road maps' for students to see the pathways from high school to post-secondary to careers (i.e. what courses lead to what careers);
- Students feel that it would be helpful if there was greater assistance provided by counsellors towards becoming self-aware and understanding what kinds of career choices would be fulfilling; and
- Students felt both peer group support and more counsellors would be beneficial.

Information:

- Life after high school should be a topic for students as early as grade nine;
- Schools should provide more career fairs, open houses and mentorship programs;
- Students want more realistic life experience opportunities such as job shadowing, and meeting current post-secondary students;
- Career Days should be expanded to include more options;
- Schools could offer field trips to post secondary schools;
- Information on trades and other career alternatives need to be provided to students;
- Students want more information on non-university options;
- Mandatory life skills courses were recommended;
- Students felt they should be encouraged to explore more than one option; and
- Students want more help in accessing information available on web sites.

3.4 Expectations and Results

Students were asked what they felt high school was preparing them for. Although they weren't asked directly about results and outcomes, the issue of marks, and diploma exams, did come up in a few of the groups.

Grand Prairie

Discussion

All three groups of students had spirited discussions about their expectations. Although many were unsure what the future held, the clear message was that while academic subjects were important, students expect high school to prepare them at least as much for 'life' situations as for an academic future.

The issue of outcomes did not generally come up, yet students did point out that when they have teachers who are not subject matter experts, they (students) have difficulty learning the materials required for diploma exams.

Recommendations

- Expand and improve CALM programs to improve students' life skills. This includes adding components such as ethics and values;
- Prepare teachers to help students learn about being independent, making appropriate decisions, and dealing with relationship issues; and
- Make diploma exams worth less than 50%, especially in 'subjective' courses where the grade given to an answer depends on the teacher's opinions.

Calgary

Discussion

Most of the students in this session had a very clear idea of the steps they would be taking after high school. These students expected high school to inform them about, and prepare them for, a broad range of options after high school, from getting jobs, to succeeding academically and socially in post-secondary school, to being able to continue life-long learning.

In one session, students commented that diploma exams were a good thing because they helped students prepare for post-secondary education.

Recommendations

- Increase the scope and breadth of 'life skills' courses, including financial management and ethics; and
- Increase hands-on experience opportunities.

3.5 Relevant and Responsive Curriculum

The key areas of discussion in this topic area were the differences between pure and applied courses, and the balance between academic subjects, trades oriented subjects, and life skills courses. Students spent considerable time talking about the CALM course, in terms of how well this course helped them prepare for the future.

Grande Prairie

Discussion

During discussions, curriculum and specific course subject matter did not come up often. Rather, students focused on the lack of opportunity to learn skills, such as critical thinking, debating and public speaking, which they felt were as necessary as academic knowledge, to their future success. Students were split in their opinion of the CALM course - some felt it was valuable, while others thought it could be valuable with considerable updating and reworking. Very few students were satisfied with the current CALM curriculum.

Students commented that there is not a clear understanding of the difference between applied and pure courses and that applied courses have a stigma of being for 'dumb kids' rather than being seen as the route to careers in trades.

Recommendations

- Update CALM courses so they are more appropriate and relevant to students' lifestyle issues and challenges. (Egg exercise and 'pretend' marriages are not seen as relevant);
- CALM elements could be integrated into other courses (e.g. setting up a household budget in math class);
- Skills like participating in open discussions, debating and presentation skills, should be taught as they encourage listening and decision making skills that students need;
- Students would like more flexibility to take courses that are not focused on diploma exam content. They suggested distance learning options for non-core electives, or the option of taking specific elements of certain courses; and
- Improve integration of skills required and formats used in high school vs. post secondary settings - academic style like APA, study and research skills.

Calgary

Discussion

Students in Calgary felt there were not enough applied courses with hands-on learning opportunities. They also felt there should be more life skills courses to assist with such things as leadership, budgeting and financial management. Students said that high school is meant to teach students how to learn, and as such, the specific subjects taught during school are of secondary importance.

It was noted that the curriculum should focus on connecting all subjects to relevant things outside of school. Students were looking for direct linkages between elements of courses they take and careers and life challenges they might face in the future. Fine arts and humanities classes should continue to be offered in schools.

CALM was also discussed - students felt it was out of date and not relevant to the situations students face today. They suggested guest speakers, job shadowing and campus visits as a means to improve the course considerably.

Students suggested that providing more optional courses, instead of 'spare' periods, would help increase the flexibility and range of offerings available.

Recommendations

- CALM should be expanded into job shadowing, finance skills, and there should be an extra class specifically related to career planning;
- In general, there needs to be more focus on life skills and social skills;
- Curriculum should have more emphasis on independent academic skills such as research methods;
- More structured tutorial time would ensure students have access to teachers for help with their homework;
- University courses and high school course content need to be more closely connected;
- More emphasis on extracurricular activities, and less on academic homework, would help students learn team work and time management, and other important life skills;
- Expand the English Pilot Program (EPP) into more schools. (Teachers had learned new subject area and were more effective at teaching the EPP); and
- Schools should offer courses in post-secondary preparation, where students can get help in preparing applications to all types of schools.

3.6 Future Classrooms

Students did not have specific discussion time dedicated to the broader question of what classrooms in the future would look like. However, the topic of technology did arise occasionally. Where it did, the consensus was that computers needed to be integrated into other parts of the curriculum, rather than being treated as a separate subject.

Grande Prairie

Discussion

Discussion related to the 'future classroom' topic was confined to the use or availability of technology in schools. Generally, students only commented on technology when they were probed, and noted that the availability of technology varies greatly by school. Some felt that their access to technology was sufficient, while others felt it was far below what is necessary.

Students expressed concern that too much of a focus on technology could interfere with their skill development in other areas, such as creativity, attention to detail, grammar and spelling.

One student suggested distance learning options for non-core courses, but other than this comment, no-one suggested using computers as part of the learning system (e.g. learning from home via the internet).

Recommendations

- Technology should be integrated into other courses; and
- Students would like more emphasis on using technology to build on essential basic skills.

Calgary

Discussion

Students pointed out that access to computer technology varied greatly across schools and that this access should be made more equal so that all students are receiving the same standard of education.

Recommendations
- Technology (e.g. computer skills) needs to be integrated into all classes, rather than taught as a subject of its own; and
- Resources like lab equipment and text books need to be updated.

4.0 Conclusion

The student consultation sessions in Calgary and Grande Prairie have clearly augmented the input received over the past eight months by Alberta's Commission on Learning. Students care passionately about the state of their education system. On issues such as class size, teacher preparation and knowledge, and advice and support for the future, students spoke eloquently about their expectations for Alberta's education system. In short, they expect the opportunity to learn the appropriate mix of skills and knowledge required to prepare for their futures beyond the classroom.

Every child **learns**.
Every child **succeeds**.

Appendix 3

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Selected Bibliography

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